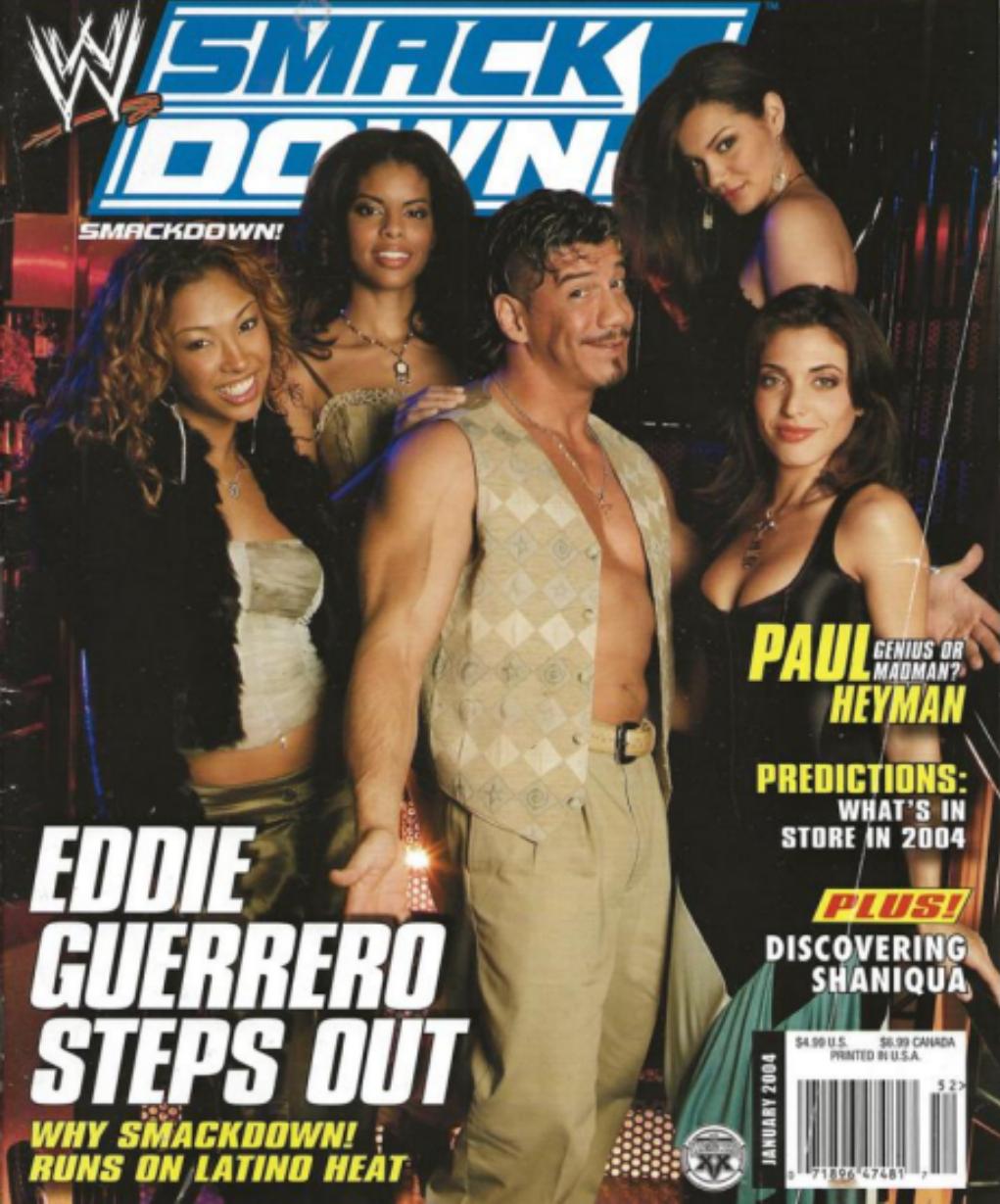


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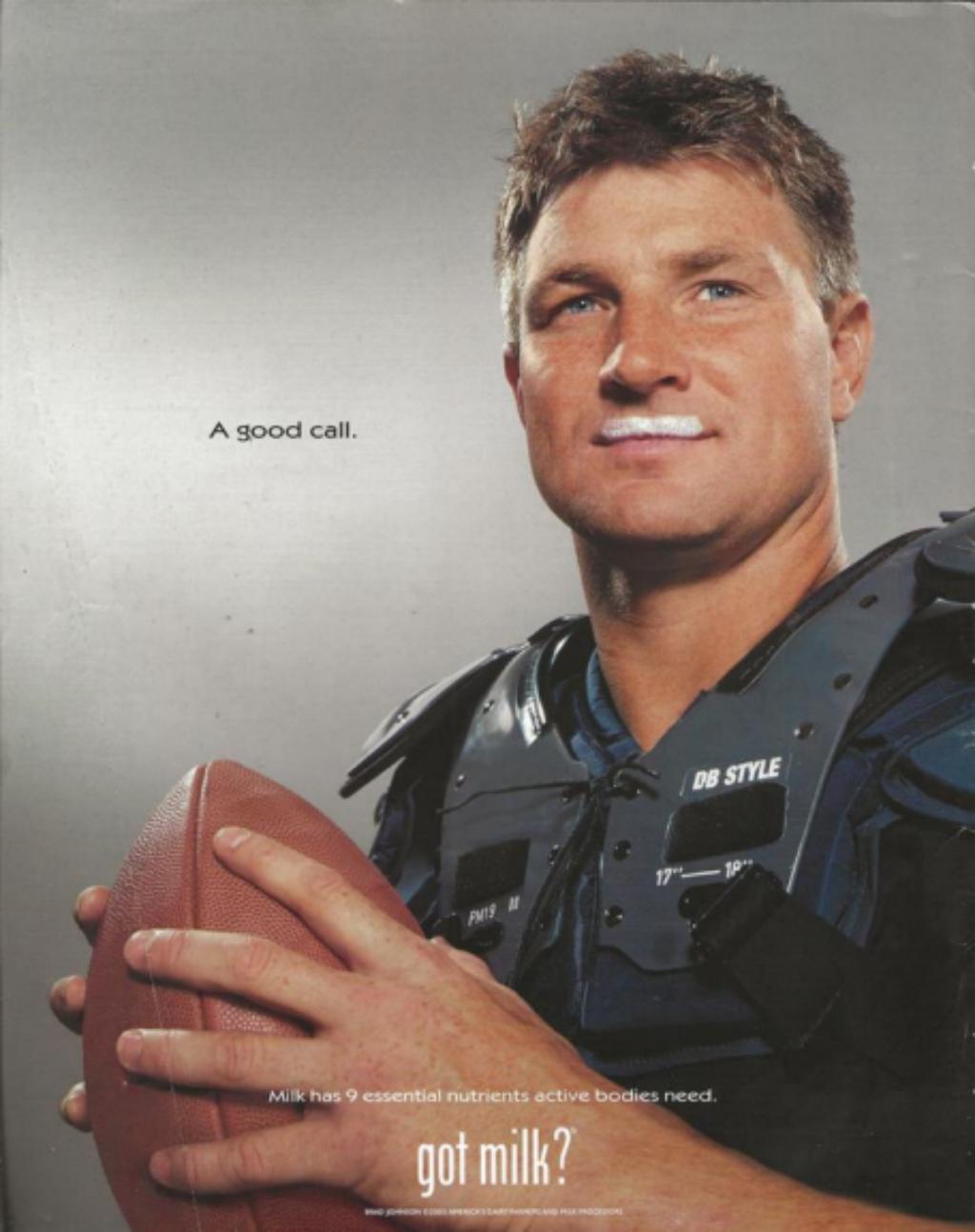
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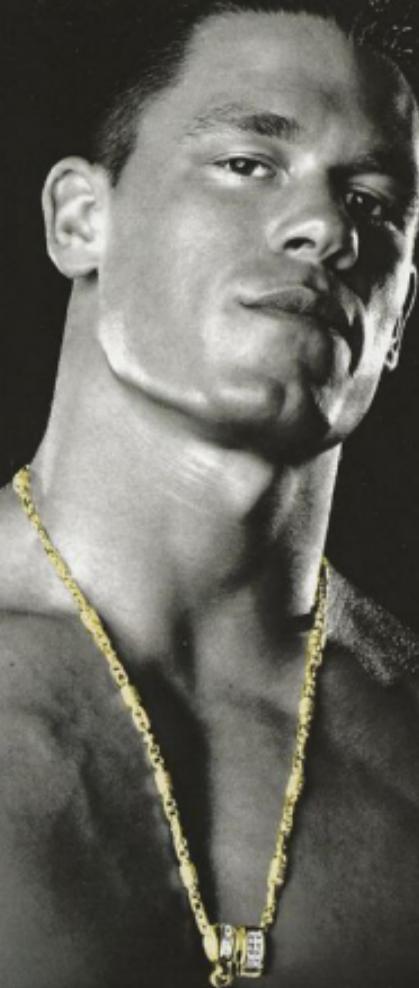
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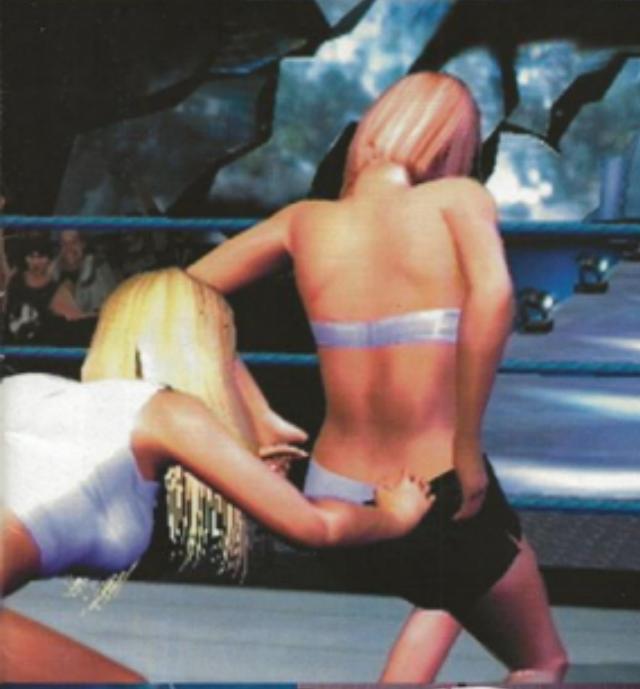
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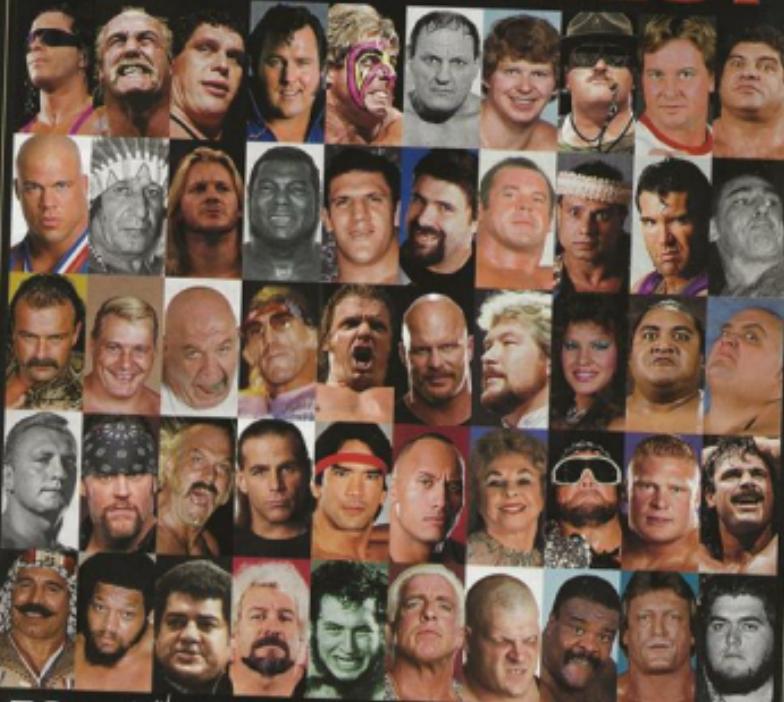
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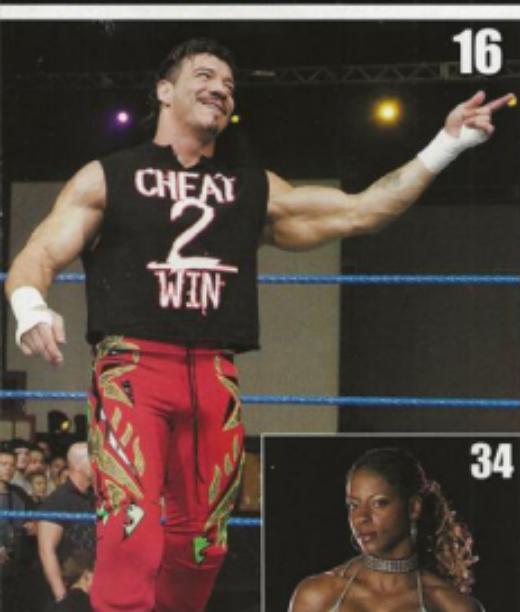


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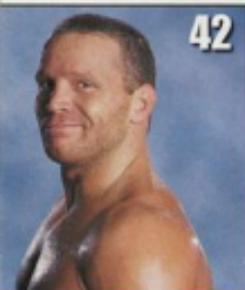


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WWE SMACKDOWN

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Paul Heyman has one of the keenest minds in the sport, and it seems like everything he touches is an instant success. But could the man who brought Brock Lesnar and Matt Morgan to WWE be headed for disaster?

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The 7th annual Survivor Series exploded from Dallas, a worthy addition to the history of WWE's second-longest running pay-per-view. Who were the winners and losers of this year's fall classic?

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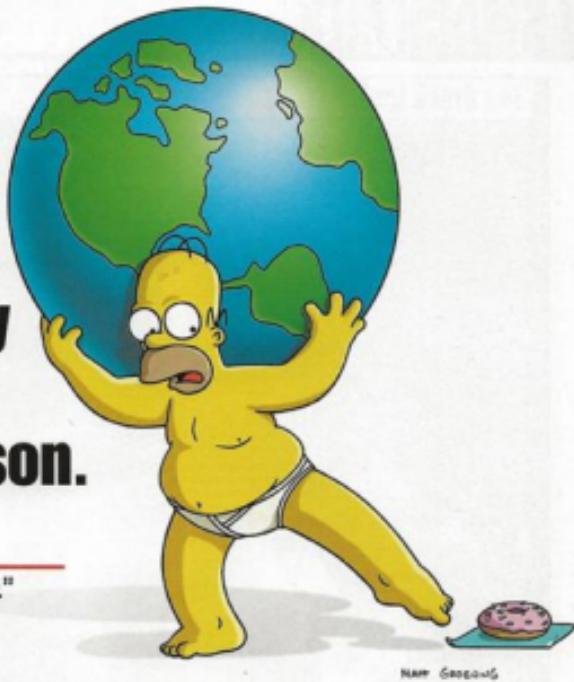
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The Brock Lock

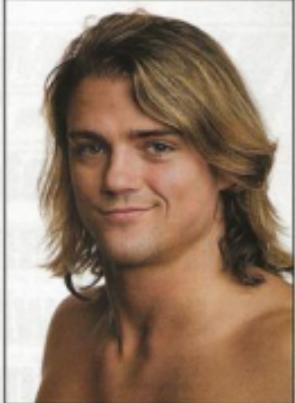


A famous London casino constantly updates its betting lines, including WWE and its champions. Recently, the casino posted a line on which Superstar would hold the WWE Championship for the longest stretch in 2004. It posted Brock Lesnar as the 1-2 favorite. The casino's bookmaker told *SmackDown! Magazine*, "Lesnar has been so thoroughly dominant in the past 18 months that we felt it would be a losing proposition for us to install him as anything less than the clear-cut favorite. Although *SmackDown!* Superstars like Undertaker, Kurt Angle and John Cena are capable of defeating him, we have a difficult time seeing Lesnar without the title for an extended period of time."

The World's Greatest...Football Player?

We all know Shelton Benjamin as one of sports-entertainment's great young athletes, a 6-foot-2, 240-pound physical specimen, who, along with Charlie Haas, comprises the self-proclaimed "World's Greatest Tag Team." But recently, an NFL team with secondary problems approached Benjamin about following in the footsteps of Bo Jackson and Deion Sanders by becoming a two-sport athlete. Benjamin, a collegiate wrestler, was also a track and football star in high school,

and has been clocked at a world-class time of 4.2 seconds in the 40-yard dash. An AFC East team approached the former high school all-state linebacker about taking over at strong safety, where his speed and knowledge of leverage would make him a sure tackler. Though reportedly offered a three-year deal, including a \$1 million signing bonus, Benjamin politely declined, saying he was focused completely on his in-ring pursuit of excellence.



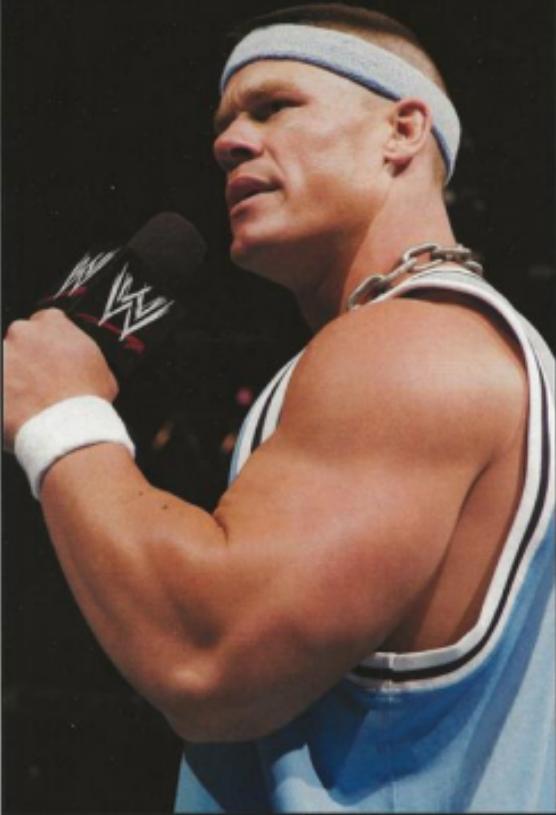
Spanky Rocks the House

"Smacktalk" correspondents have recently noticed a groundswell of support for Spanky, as fans in arenas everywhere have apparently adopted the 5-foot-7, 180-pounder. Perhaps Spanky won them over with his persistent efforts to get into WWE, which finally paid off with a contract. More likely, they recognize that his talent and persistence will one day pay off in a championship, and they simply want to get on the bandwagon early. Regardless of their motive, we applaud the fans for getting behind an underdog, and sticking with him on his journey through the land of giants.

Shoot (Pictures) First, Ask Questions Later?

Recently, the *SmackDown!* Divas flew to Mexico for a magazine photo shoot. While company executives were nervous about sworn rivals spending several days together with few distractions, many were shocked to see longtime adversaries Torie Wilson and Sable interacting quite cordially. In fact, WWE photographers took advantage of the surprising development to fashion an impromptu shoot with both women. Sources are unsure if the truce continues to this day, but in the last month or so, backstage sources say there is a possible business development brewing between the pair.

Pass the Mic



When John Cena signed with WWE, the rookie confidently told sports-entertainment reporters that he was the next great Superstar, referring to himself as "the prototype" for the future. After little more than a year in the business, it appears those words ring true. We can't help but see the parallels between his career and The Rock's. Both men started as wide-eyed former football players who were booed by the crowd before their witty tongues and athletic abilities won over the masses. Cena has been moving forward and gaining momentum, and his recent surge in popularity has made him a bona fide drawing card. Though Cena respects the "People's Champion," sources say that he hopes to eventually face The Rock—both on the mic and in the ring—and beat him at his own game.

Honoring Rey



Mexico's favorite native son, Rey Mysterio, recently returned to his home country to visit friends and family. Reports in the local media say that he was given a full hero's welcome. In addition to a huge crowd waiting at the airport, he was given a police escort to his destination, where he was surprised with a ticker-tape parade and honored with a two-day-long fiesta in his honor. The man who revolutionized cruiserweight wrestling was so taken with the reception that he promised the local contingent that he'd renew his commitment to excellence, vowing to challenge for the WWE Championship in the upcoming year.

SmackDown! Tour Guide

| | |
|---|---|
| 1/3: Glendale, AZ 7:30 pm | 1/17: Minot, ND 7:30 pm |
| 1/4: Albuquerque, NM 2:00 pm | 1/18: Grand Forks, ND 1:00 pm |
| 1/5: Texarkana, AR 7:00 pm | 1/19: Duluth, MN 7:00 pm |
| 1/6: Little Rock, AR SmackDown! 7:30 pm | 1/20: Minneapolis, MN SmackDown! 7:30 pm |
| 1/10: Kalamazoo, MI 7:30 pm | 1/25: Philadelphia, PA Royal Rumble 7:45 pm |
| 1/11: Codicil, MI 2:00 pm | 1/27: Washington, DC SmackDown! 7:30 pm |
| 1/12: Saginaw, MI 7:00 pm | 1/31: Reading, PA 7:30 pm |
| 1/13: Mahopac, NY SmackDown! 7:30 pm | |

Thuganomics 101: Don't Be Fooled by the Fans!

Everyone wants to be accepted. Everyone wants that reassurance that comes with knowing you're wanted and loved. It's a natural human desire, almost as strong as hunger, thirst or lust. But like those three other cravings, it can serve as your downfall if you're not careful. That's the problem that faces John Cena right now.

Ever since he asserted his independence in the face of Paul Heyman and his cronies, Cena has been experiencing strong support from crowds everywhere he goes. The second word has been removed from the familiar chants of "Cena Sucks!" so that now it is only the Superstar's name that's shouted out by adoring fans far and wide.

Astute mat watchers may have noticed that the groundswell was actually a long time coming. It was hard not to chuckle at Cena's clever raps and the impressive way he backed them up in the ring. Little by little, a brave minority voiced positive opinions of the thuggish grappler. Hooking up with Kurt Angle's team at Survivor Series was just the icing on the cake.

Well, now it's time for the wake-up call. If Cena expects the fans to get him through the trials and tribulations of the ring, he's sadly mistaken. Many a Superstar has made the mistake of thinking that fan support was all he needed to succeed. It takes a hell of a lot more than that. All he'd have to do is give Psycho Sid a call to find that out.

In fact, sometimes support can do more harm than good. Cena is a perfect hypothetical. He's always claimed to be a remorseless, hard-as-nails type who would never let anyone tell him what to do. He's "thug" to the core, remember? If that really is still the case, then he'd better make sure that hearing all those cheers doesn't make him go soft.

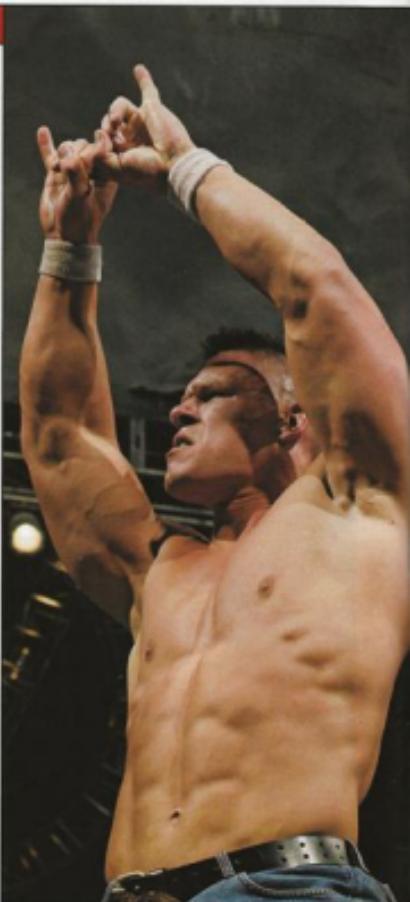
Don't get me wrong. I've got nothing against the fans. Hell, I'm one of them. I think Cena has as much potential as any

competitor WWE has produced in the past year. But the last thing I'd ever expect is for him to be looking to someone like me for approval. The John Cena I remember would never give a rat's ass about what I thought of him. And that's just how it should be.

There certainly is a happy medium to be found, there's no arguing that. Superstars like Kurt Angle and The Rock have been raised to great heights with the fervent support of the fans, and they owe the fans a lot for what they were able to achieve. It's possible that Cena may find that middle ground. He may be able to balance his loner street image with the adoration of the masses. But he has to continue to think of himself first.

What happens when someone like Chris Benoit, Rey Mysterio or another Superstar beloved by the fans stands between Cena and a goal he wants to achieve? The fans may not want him to take a shot at another of their favorites, and that's where he'll have a tough decision to make. It's all well and good when he's taking a steel chair to Brock Lesnar or A-Train; the people love him then. But sooner or later, Cena will have to make a choice between popularity and prestige. Because all the chants and cheers in the world won't help pay the bills when you find yourself with the loser's share of the purse. No fan letter will ever take the place of a championship belt around your waist.

Yes, we all yearn for approval. We all need to be loved. But John Cena has to understand that what he needs may

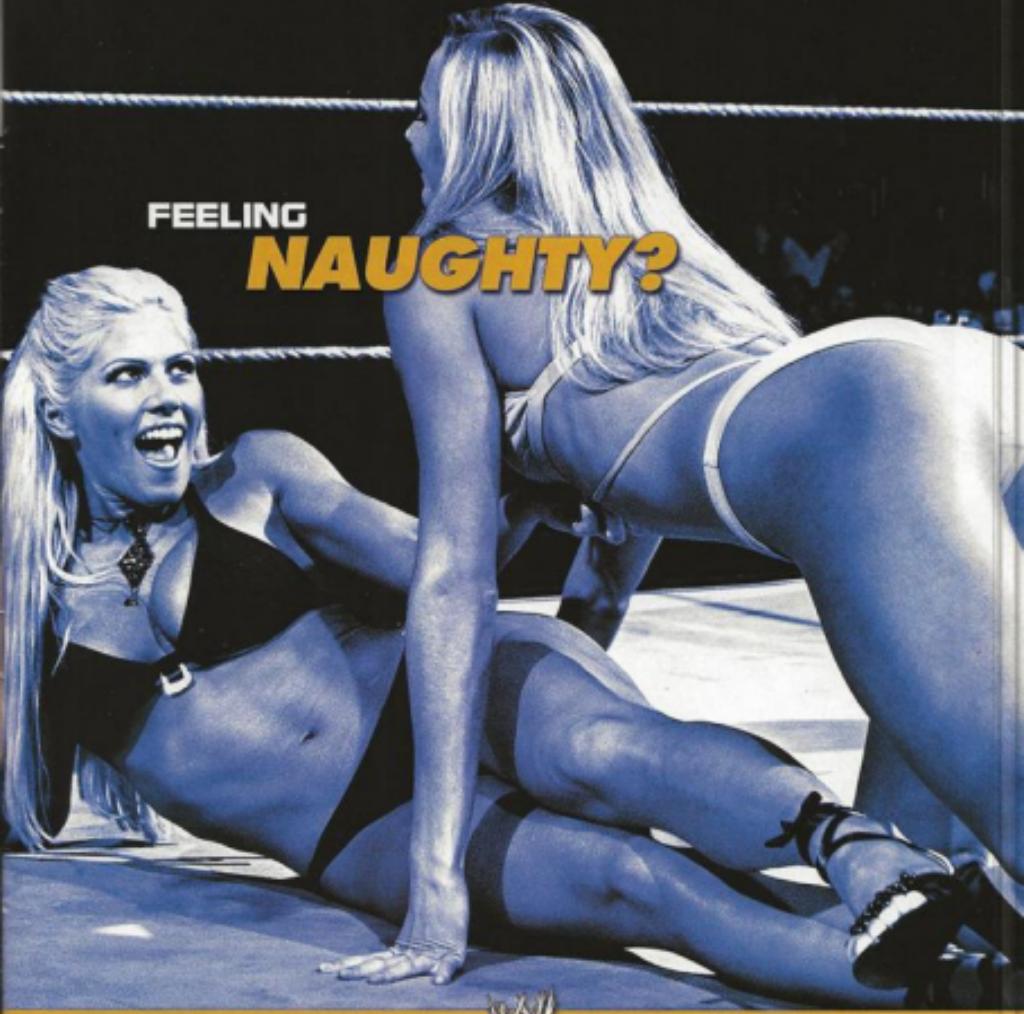


not necessarily help him get what he wants.

So in closing, John Cena would be wise to remember the words of the famous author Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote, "Who so would be a man must be a nonconformist." ■

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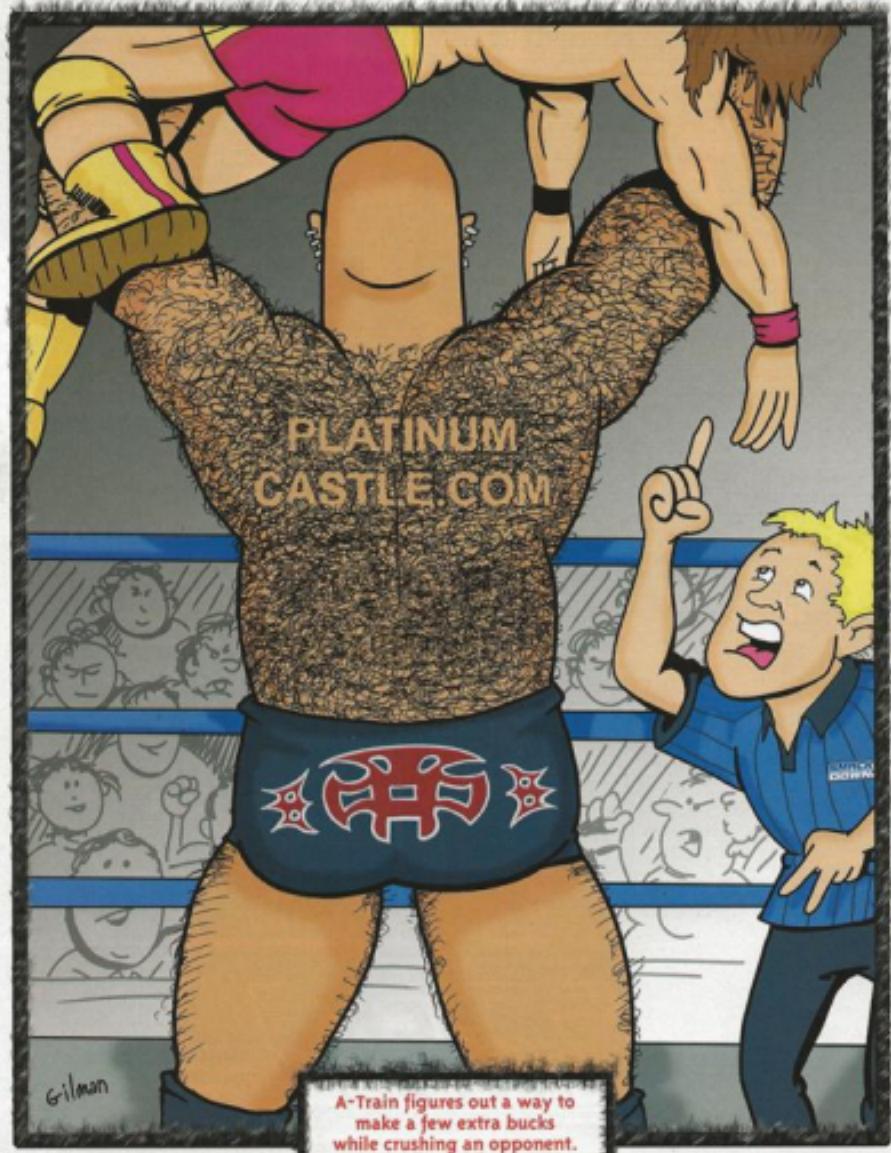
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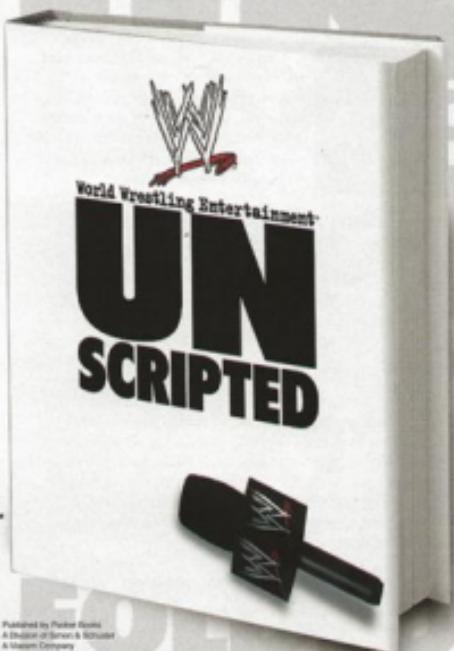
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You, the readers, have the chance to pick the brains of the *SmackDown!* Superstars on any subject you like! Mail your questions to: *SmackDown! Magazine* • c/o World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. • 1241 E. Main Street • Stamford, CT 06902. Or e-mail your questions to: sdmag@wwe.com • With the subject line: "Ask the Superstars"

Travis Holtz asks:

What's the worst injury you've suffered in the ring?

• **A broken finger, that's it.** I landed the wrong way on a dropkick. — **Spanky**

• **I had a pinched nerve in my neck.** It caused a horrible knotting in my right shoulder blade, which traveled down my triceps, through my forearm and into my fingers. My vertebra was actually turned sideways, which pinched the nerve. I have no idea how I did it. — **Tony Garea**

• **Blowing out my ACL and tearing my meniscus.** It happened down in the Heartland Wrestling Association (HWA) when I was wrestling Bill DeMott. It happened at the beginning of the match, and I couldn't straighten my leg out. It was just locked in a bent position. I had to finish the match on one leg. — **Charlie Haas**



• **A torn biceps, which was last spring.** I was out for four months. I was wrestling a Velocity match. The bell rang, and I went to give an arm drag, and it popped immediately. We were literally five seconds into the match. — **Chavo Guerrero**

• **Dude, don't you see the swelling?** It may never go down. — **Shaniqua**

• **It was 1993.** I was in Monticello wrestling an independent guy. He slammed me down and went for a 450 splash. Unfortunately, he did about a 128. He landed on my face, broke my jaw and knocked all my teeth out. They redid my whole face. I was out for about a year. The bone was in little pieces. — **Nunzio**

• **I ripped up my ankle and knee pretty bad when I was first starting out.** I got wedged in between the ropes and whipped back, and my left ankle and knee just separated. The ankle got the worst of it. It's still like two times the size of my right ankle. I never went to the hospital. I just worked around it. — **John Cena**

• **That's the stupidest f***in' question I've ever heard.** — **Hardcore Holly**

• **The one that put me out of action was my elbow.** I had about five pieces of bone removed and a couple of bone spurs were floating around. Apparently, I had broken my arm and didn't know it! I was training in the ring and it just gave way. — **Nathan Jones**

• **When I tore my pec muscle.** I was wrestling Dean Malenko on a WCW pay-per-view, went to the top rope, went for a cross body on the outside, and he ducked. As he ducked, my arm caught the top of his head, and I just ripped it. — **Eddie Guerrero**

• **I hyperflexed my elbow in a dark match,** ironically in my hometown. I did a 450 splash, and when I came down, it wasn't the initial landing, but the bounce after the landing that forced my arm to hyperflex, and it tore ligaments. — **Shelton Benjamin**

• **A broken rib.** I got squished by Big Show. I wrestled for about eight months with it. — **Brock Lesnar**

• **A herniated disc in my neck.** Several different things contributed to it. It wasn't just one move. Crazy f***in' bumps for a crazy f***in' guy. — **Rhyno**

• **I think it was classified as a second-degree neck sprain.** It happened at a flea market show, so I didn't have any insurance. I did a springboard in the center of the ring and did a complete header. I had to use a chiropractor at the flea market. I was in a neck brace for about two months. — **Paul London**

• **My right rotator cuff.** I went down for a DDT with Undertaker. As I was trying to break the fall, my weight and his weight came down and tore my arm. — **Rikishi**



• **Last year in December,** I smashed my left ankle on the steel post when I dropped from the top rope to the outside on Rey Mysterio. — **Tajiri**

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SmackDown!'s Best-Kept Secret

Giuseppe's Diner is located on 38th Street in Manhattan, just blocks from the mecca of sports-entertainment, Madison Square Garden. The food served there is nothing special; plenty of grease and mounds of home fries seem to come with every meal. Yet, seats are difficult to come by. If you're looking for a table on the same night as *SmackDown!* at the Garden, forget about it. From three in the afternoon until three in the morning, the wait to get seated can last hours.



By Aaron Williams

One night, not too long ago, this reporter was lucky enough to get a stool at the counter just minutes after the Garden had emptied out. It may have cost about \$100 to be the hostess, but my editor had sent me on assignment to see what this place was all about, so I forked over the dough. It wasn't long before it became evident that the money was well spent.

As expected, the place was jam-packed, and the discussion at every table centered

on the *SmackDown!* show that had just finished. The names of Lesnar, Angle, McMahon, Benjamin and Haas echoed through the restaurant.

At the booth to my immediate right, a particularly heated discussion was going on. Four men, two of whom must have been in their 50s or 60s, and two who looked to be in their late 20s—perhaps they were fathers and sons—argued about the most underrated Superstar on the *SmackDown!* roster.

"Rhyno is far and away the most underrated Superstar," claimed one of the younger gents.

"Rhyno's not underrated," responded one of the older men. "Everyone knows how good he is. The most underrated grappler is Ultimo Dragon. The guy is unbelievable."

"Nahhh," chimed in the other older man. "A-Train. Now there's a guy who could be WWE Champion if given the chance. He's the most underrated guy."

"Charlie Haas has more talent than anyone," the fourth gentleman blurted out. "No matter how much praise he gets, he's still underrated."

The conversation continued for the next 20 minutes. Back and forth, the participants went, each espousing the talents of their favorite, and vigorously arguing why their guy, and not the others, should be considered the most underrated Superstar. No matter how strong one person's points were, no one budged from his position. And then suddenly, appearing from nowhere, an old man approached the table.

He had to be in his 80s, and he walked with a slight stoop. He carried himself as if he had been through his fair share of ring wars; his forehead was scarred and his ears were cauliflowered. His face looked familiar, yet his name completely escaped me.

As he neared the table, the four men stopped talking and looked at him. They, too, seemed to recognize him without being able to place where or when they had seen him.

There were a few seconds of silence before the man spoke.

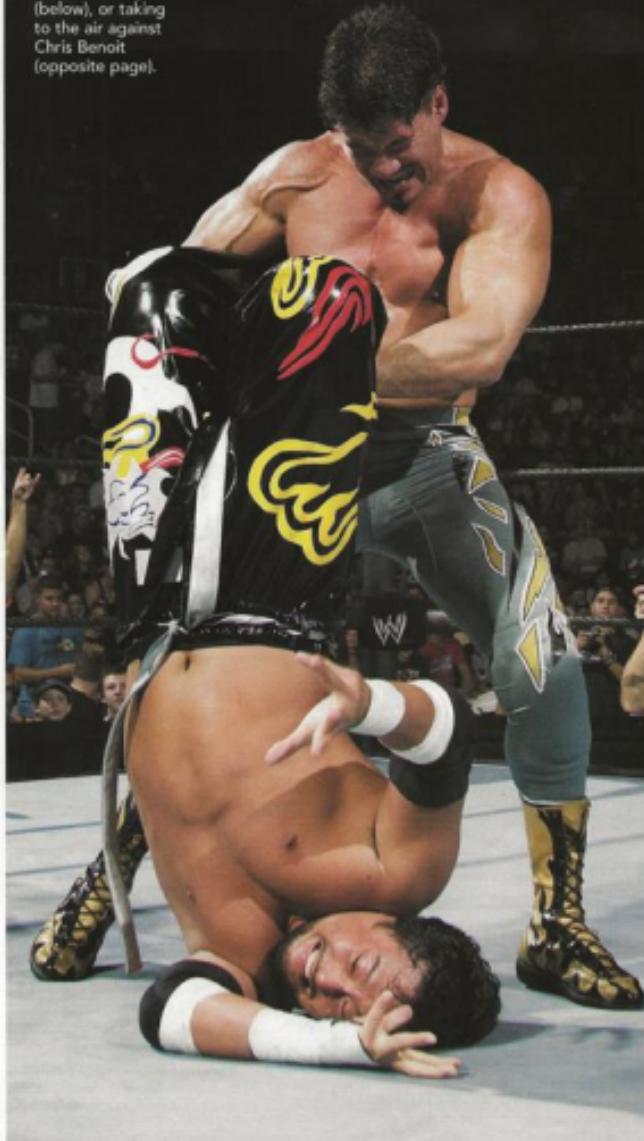
"I've heard your arguments," he said in a raspy whisper. "I've heard your arguments," he repeated, "and I have two words for you: Eddie Guerrero."

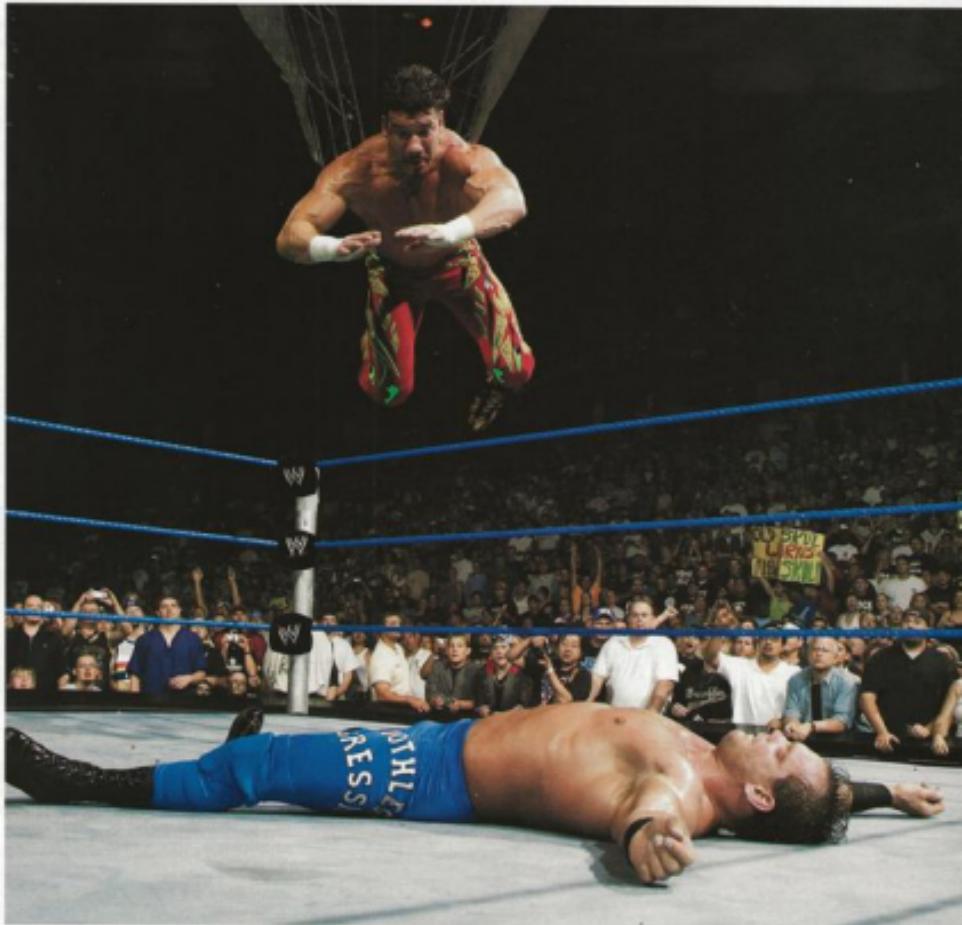
"Eddie Guerrero!" all four exclaimed at once. "How could we have forgotten about him?"

"Exactly," the old man said in an accent that seemed to imply a youth spent in the Mediterranean. "Eddie Guerrero compares with anybody that I have ever seen wrestle, and as you can probably tell, I've seen quite a few. He has the skills of Strangler Lewis and the showmanship of Gorgeous George."

"But he's never won the WWE

Eddie can do it all, mixing it up on the mat with the likes of Tajiri (below), or taking to the air against Chris Benoit (opposite page).





Championship," one of the younger men replied.

"And why do you think that is?" asked the old man.

"Because he hasn't been given the chance," the gentleman to his right uttered. "Think about it: How many title shots has Eddie gotten? Yet, think about how the fans respond to him. Think about all the times we talk

about all the great matches he's been in. Remember how entertaining we always say he is?"

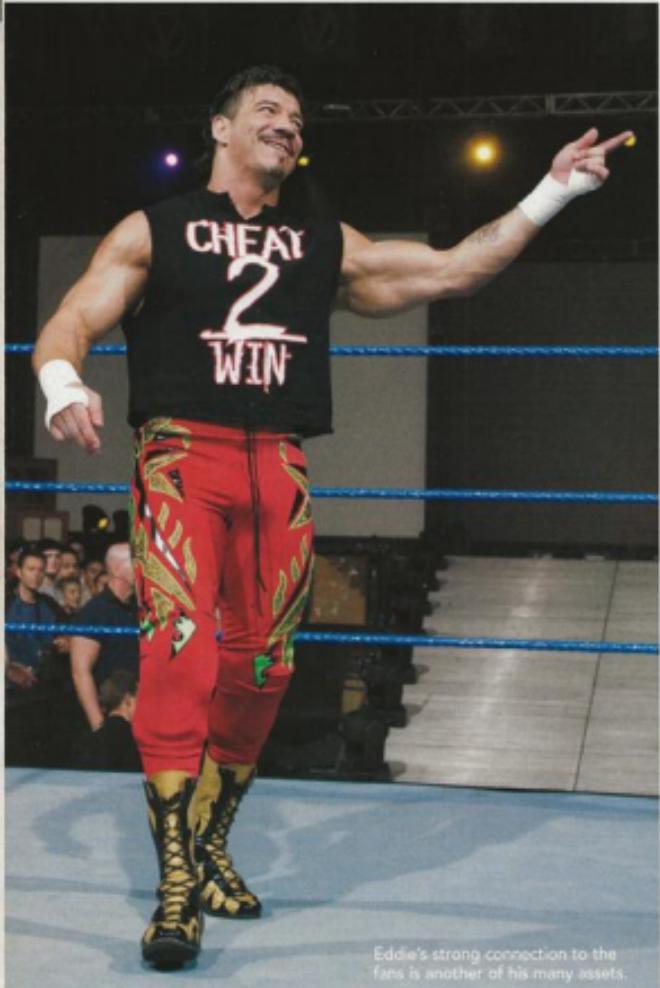
"Is there anything Eddie can't do?" asked the fourth member of the table.

Once again, the table fell silent for a few seconds as everyone scoured their minds to come up with something that Guerrero can't do.

"Eddie does it all," said the old

man, interrupting the silence. "He can fly through the air. He can grapple on the mat, and even an old-timer like me appreciates his humor. When Eddie wrestles, I watch. Everyone watches, and everyone loves to watch him."

"Well," said the one young man who still refused to concede that Eddie is the most underrated Superstar on SmackDown!, "until he wins the WWE



Eddie's strong connection to the fans is another of his many assets.

Championship, I can't put him in the same class as Brock Lesnar, Kurt Angle and Undertaker."

"That would be *your* mistake," the old man replied, speaking barely above a whisper. "Whether he gets the chance, I don't know. But if Eddie finally gets

the chance, he will become champion. But even if he doesn't, that won't diminish his greatness.

"Many great men go their entire lives without winning a championship," the old man continued. "The great baseball player Ted Williams never won a World

Series, yet he is considered by many to be the greatest hitter ever. Ty Cobb, the greatest ballplayer I ever saw, and the man with the best batting average of all time, never won a World Series. Karl Malone, the NBA superstar, will score more points than anyone else who ever played the game, and he may not win a championship either.

"This doesn't diminish their greatness," he continued. "There are many reasons why one wins a world championship, and not all of them have to do with ability. Given the chance, Eddie would have several WWE Championships by now."

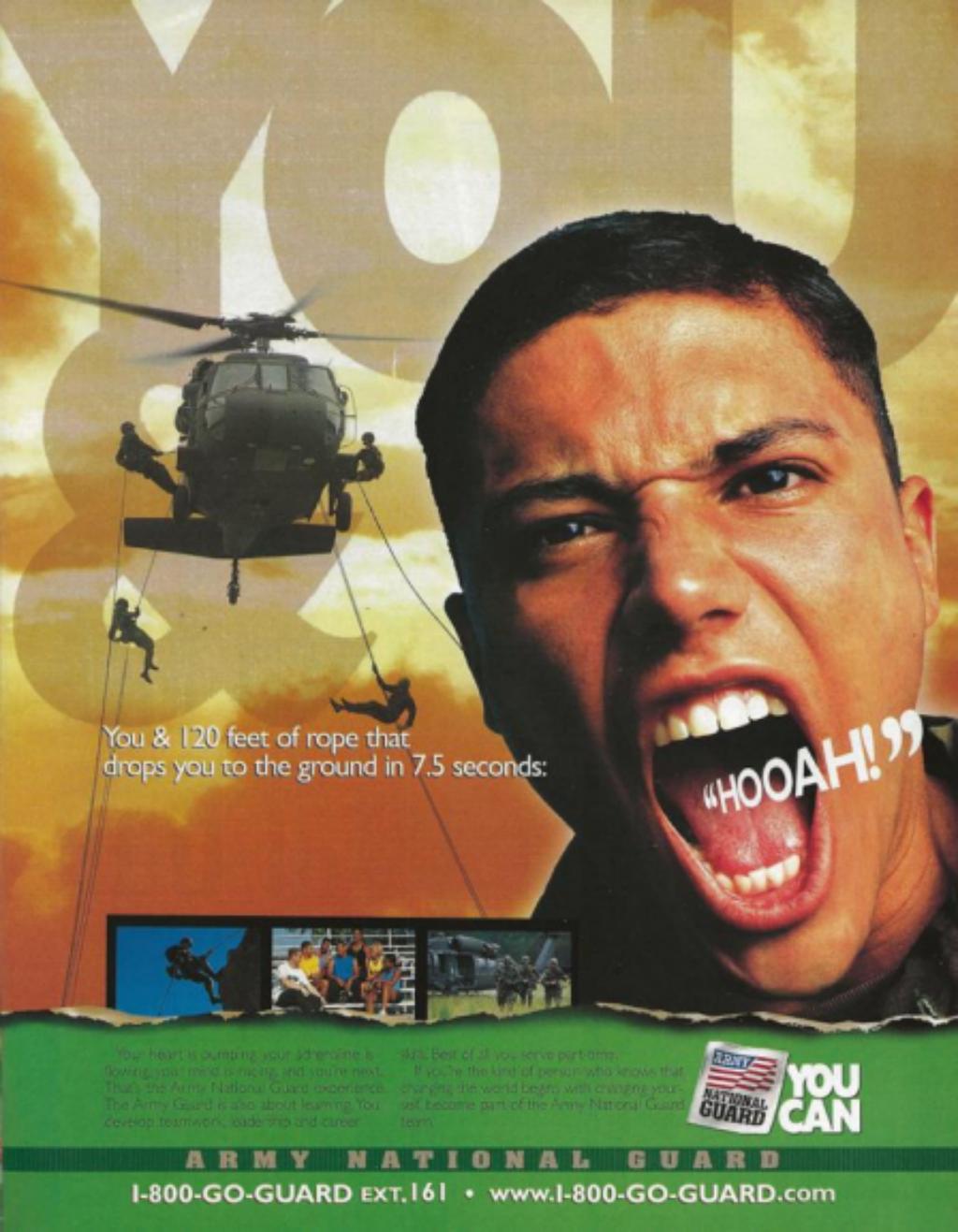
With those words, the old man tipped his hat and walked from the table. He melted into the crowd before I saw him say goodbye to Giuseppe, the owner of the diner, and head out the door.

So is Eddie Guerrero the most underrated Superstar on the *SmackDown!* roster? Perhaps the better question: When will he get his much-deserved shot at the WWE Championship?

Rumor has it that someone very high up in the pecking order has something against Latino Heat and has enlisted a number of Superstars to keep Eddie down. Based upon the past few months and all that has happened to Guerrero, it seems more than likely that there is some type of conspiracy to keep Eddie from achieving the ultimate prize.

Why would there be such a conspiracy? The answer, it seems, is jealousy. Eddie is a ladies man. He's worked hard for everything he has gotten, and he's earned the respect of those who follow the profession closely. Simply put, he's a success and a potential WWE Champion. Some people apparently can't handle that. They see Eddie as a threat. Call it selfishness, greed or cowardice, but these people just don't want to Eddie to succeed.

In the past, Eddie has aligned himself with others to fend off the haters. The results have been mixed. Now, however, he seems intent to conquer his foes on his own. Win or lose, Eddie's future solely depends on himself. But if there's any justice in this world, Latino Heat will soon be draped in *SmackDown!* gold. ■



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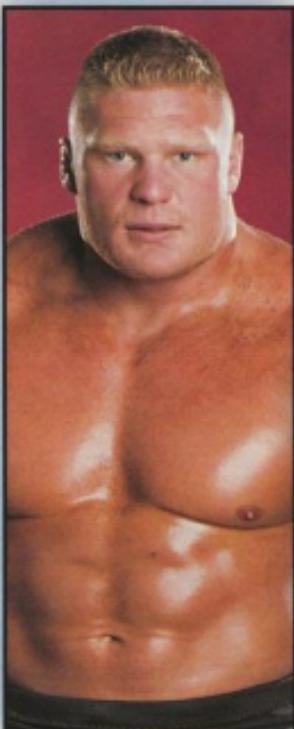
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SmackDown! 2004:

A Look into the Crystal Ball

It's that time of year again, when we close the book on the old year and start thinking about the new one that lies before us. This has traditionally been a time when our staff ponders what the future might hold for the Superstars of WWE. And this time, thanks to this brand-new publication, we were able to focus our attention completely on the *SmackDown!* roster. So let's take a look at what our crystal ball told us may be in store for some of our favorite Thursday night titans...



BROCK LESNAR

The youngest WWE Champion of all time will continue to make history. Lesnar has toppled much of the SmackDown! roster, and come to personify the concept of "ruthless aggression." Like Bob Backlund—the WWE Champion of the 1970s and early '80s and a fellow Minnesota amateur—Brock has the potential to hold the WWE crown for years, unlike other Superstars whose reigns never exceeded a few months. But despite the brute force he exudes, Lesnar faces the danger of imploding if he doesn't take complete command of his powers.

UNDERTAKER

With WrestleMania XX on the horizon, Undertaker is under greater pressure than ever before. After more than a decade of bare-fisted combat, there are those who wonder if he can retain his undefeated WrestleMania streak. There are certainly dents in the armor, and his adversaries claim to see weaknesses. But given the historical significance of WrestleMania XX, and Undertaker's awareness of his role in sports-entertainment history, he will likely leave the annual spectacular bloody, but triumphant.



KURT ANGLE

After major neck surgery this past year, Angle amazed skeptics by winning the WWE Championship. However, he has been worn down by his frequent battles with Lesnar, and many wonder how long the former Olympic gold medalist can remain at the top of the mountain. But Angle's detractors are usually people whose skills could never match his. Those people have no concept of the intestinal fortitude that has powered him through adversity in the past, and it will eventually lead him to at least one more WWE title reign.

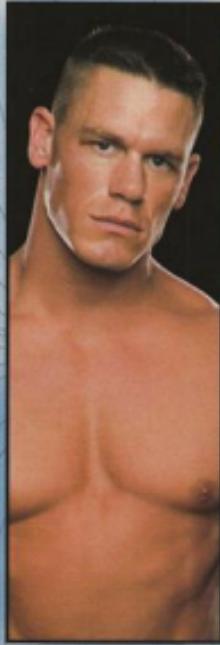
BIG SHOW

Since his first day in the sport, Big Show has been compared to the legendary Andre the Giant. Although it sounds sacrilegious, Show has actually surpassed the "Eighth Wonder of the World," not only in titles accumulated, but in his ability to vary his style for different opponents. Always a threat to win another WWE Championship, Show will surprise fans this year by focusing on other honors, possibly in the tag team division.



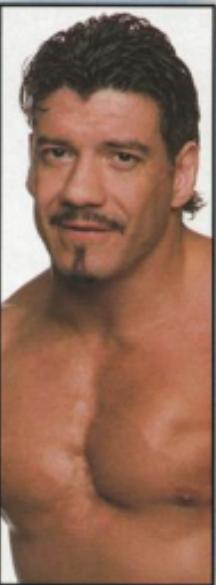
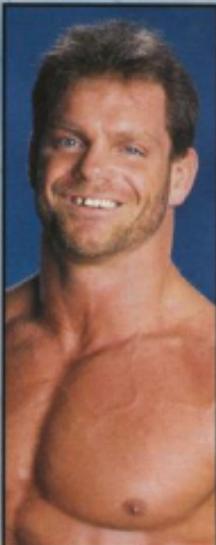
JOHN CENA

The early comparisons to a certain '80s one-hit wonder have long faded. Cena is anything but a flash-in-the-pan. He has thrown himself into combat against the best, and has improved with each match. Because of his youth, the brash Superstar remains fearless, and, thus, is capable of anything. Any WWE headliner can be humiliated by Cena on any given night. The fans have taken a liking to him, and because of his innate charisma, he may be the next member of the WWE fraternity to make his name in Hollywood.



CHRIS BENOIT

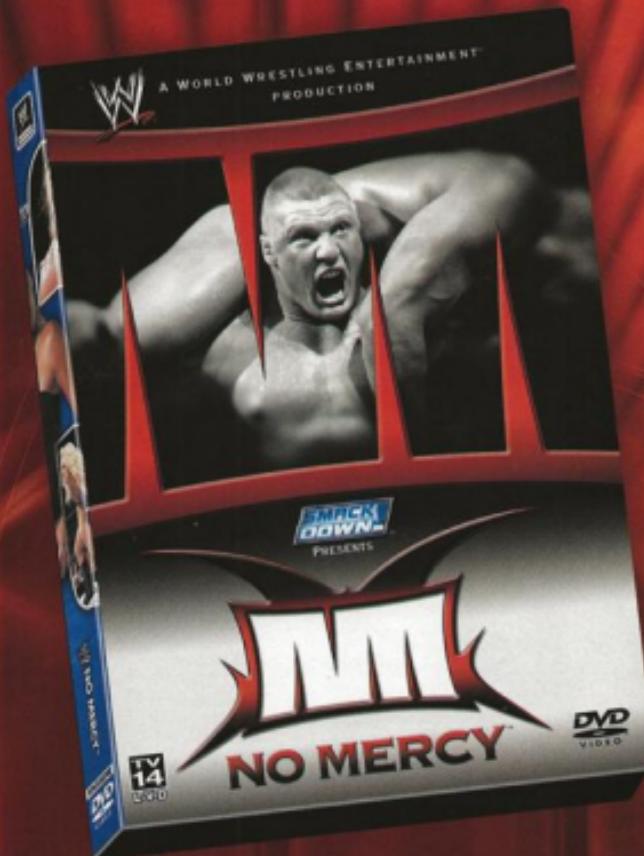
While the legendary Stu Hart died in October, part of his spirit lives on in the "Rabid Wolverine." Benoit is universally acknowledged as a wrestler who would have thrived in any generation. Ten years after WrestleMania X, when Bret "Hit Man" Hart emerged from Madison Square Garden with the WWE Championship, Benoit shows signs of being the new "excellence of execution." The difference is that Benoit has studied Hart's career, and knows how to avoid the landmines that exploded under the Hit Man's feet. While others focus on titles, Benoit is building a legacy, and will be referred to with reverence 50 years from now.



EDDIE GUERRERO

The youngest of Mexican icon Gory Guerrero's sons has attained a higher level of fame than any other member of his talented family. WrestleMania XX provides the stage for him to achieve immortality. While other Latino Superstars were known for their scorching tempers, Latino Heat has learned to stoke his inner fire and channel it in the proper direction. He is now one of the wisest and most gifted athletes in the SmackDown! dressing room, and is rapidly approaching the day when men like Angle and Lesnar jealously look at him with golden envy.

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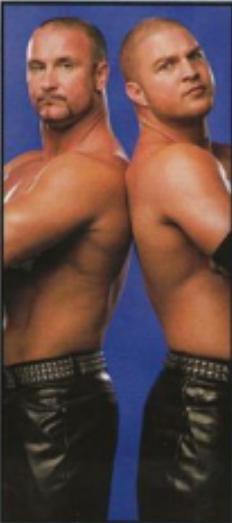


CHARLIE HAAS & SHELTON BENJAMIN

They've called themselves the "World's Greatest Tag Team." But, this year, Haas and Benjamin will actually live up to the boast. Nothing comes without paying dues, but in time, the former college standouts will eclipse all-time greats like the British Bulldogs and the Road Warriors. Perhaps the only stumbling block in their path is whether they remain a tandem. If they choose not to, expect Benjamin and Haas to give in to their competitiveness and challenge each other.

THE BASHAM BROTHERS

Doug & Danny Basham have yet to comprehend that every week, they put on a clinic of innovative maneuvers for the rest of the *SmackDown!* crew. This year, they will be disappointed when some of those moves are used against them. Because of a number of lifelong emotional issues, the Basham Brothers are completely dependent on Shaniqua to look out for their interests and lead them to the top of the tag team ranks. Expect one of the Bashams—possibly Danny—to fall in love with Shaniqua, and the bond between the siblings to become even more dysfunctional.

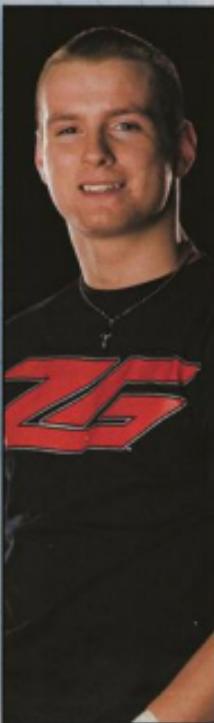


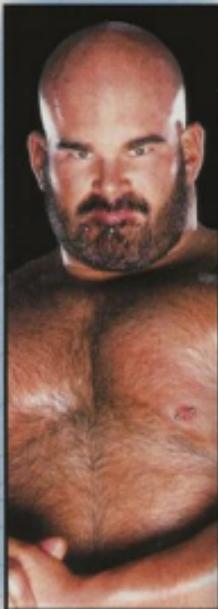
REY MYSTERIO

Because of Mysterio, the WWE Cruiserweight division has finally achieved the esteem it warrants. But just being a cruiserweight is not enough for Mysterio. This year, he will challenge for the U.S. title, and may surprise fans by throwing himself into contention for the WWE Championship.

ZACH GOWEN

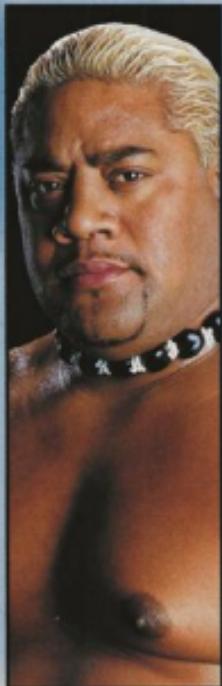
He's been associated with Hulk Hogan, wrestled Vince McMahon, and defeated Matt Hardy on pay-per-view. Now, Gowen has moved far beyond being a novelty act. Gowen will spend much of the next year trying to prove this, taking on matches that many will deride as foolhardy. In the course of this campaign, he will enjoy the support of the wrestling public. However, he may not be prepared for his new visibility and could place himself in serious danger.





RIKISHI

After rehabbing from a number of injuries, Rikishi is poised to have the best year of his career. Nonetheless, too much idle time is never good. Rikishi's long sabbatical may have prompted him to re-evaluate his place in the world. That could mean distractions that interfere with competition—like teaching a Samoan-American studies course at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, or starting a ministry with Rhyno, Scotty 2 Hotty and Nunzio.



A-TRAIN

A-Train hasn't quite reconciled himself to play an enforcer role. Within the last year, people around him have often influenced his actions—and those people were usually encouraging A-Train to hurt somebody else. He will continue to hurt people, but he may also surprise fans by thinking for himself. There is also the possibility that he may attempt to leave *SmackDown!* for the *Raw* roster, where he can challenge Bill Goldberg and fulfill a dream of becoming the most dominant Jewish-American in sports-entertainment history.



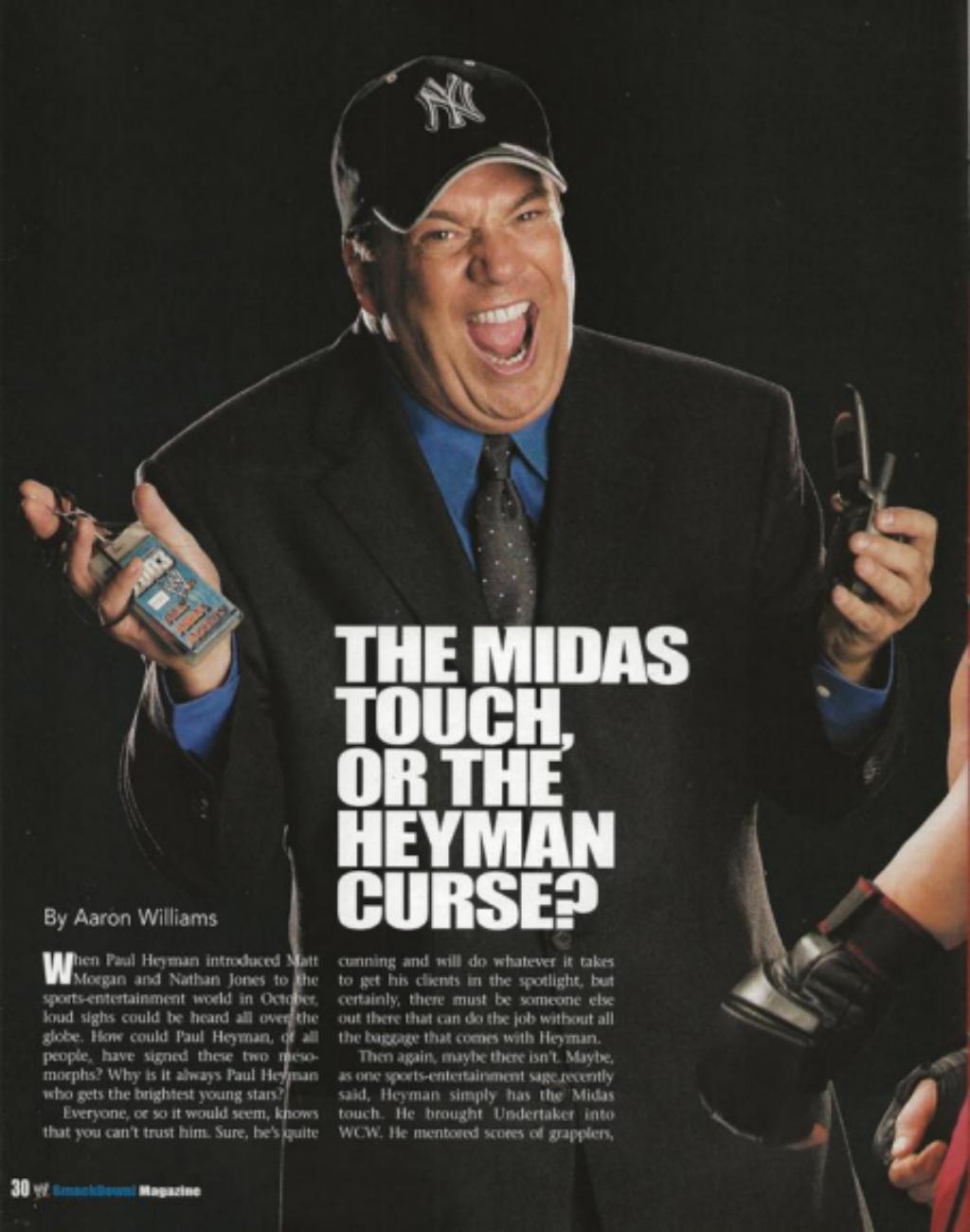
DAWN MARIE

Since the death of her husband, Al Wilson—father of Torrie Wilson—Dawn Marie has been lonely, and she's looking for another older man to fill the void. She may focus her affections on some WWE Hall of Famers, like Killer Kowalski and "Golden Boy" Arnold Skaaland. She may even make a pilgrimage to Pittsburgh to cultivate some type of friendship with a fellow Italian-American. ■

SABLE

Sable's belief that she is the hottest Diva on *SmackDown!* is shared by a large section of the male audience, and she may go to extreme lengths to reaffirm this. At some point, she will grow tired of Mr. McMahon and dump him for someone else. Among her possible love interests: Brian "Spanky" Kendrick, Chuck Palumbo and presidential candidate Howard Dean.





THE MIDAS TOUCH, OR THE HEYMAN CURSE?

By Aaron Williams

When Paul Heyman introduced Matt Morgan and Nathan Jones to the sports-entertainment world in October, loud sighs could be heard all over the globe. How could Paul Heyman, of all people, have signed these two mesomorphs? Why is it always Paul Heyman who gets the brightest young stars?

Everyone, or so it would seem, knows that you can't trust him. Sure, he's quite

cunning and will do whatever it takes to get his clients in the spotlight, but certainly, there must be someone else out there that can do the job without all the baggage that comes with Heyman.

Then again, maybe there isn't. Maybe, as one sports-entertainment sage recently said, Heyman simply has the Midas touch. He brought Undertaker into WCW. He mentored scores of grapplers,



A large, muscular shirtless man (Matt Morgan) stands in the foreground, flexing his right arm. He wears white and black striped trunks. To his right, a middle-aged man in a dark suit and tie (Nathan Jones) stands with his hands on his hips, smiling. In the background, another man (Paul Heyman) is partially visible, also smiling. They are in a dark, ring-like setting with ropes.

including Stone Cold Steve Austin, Mick Foley, The Dudleyz, Chris Benoit, Chris Jericho, Rob Van Dam, Lita, Rey Mysterio and Eddie Guerrero, just to name a few. And, in case anyone has forgotten, it was Paul Heyman who brought Brock Lesnar to WWE. Everyone he touches seems to turn to gold.

Heyman has claimed that the super-talented come to him for the green, and although it's easy to hate the man, it's difficult to dispute the facts. Heyman may indeed have the Midas touch, and perhaps it is his lust for wealth (which he imparts to his clients) that drives him and allows him to capture so much talent.

Of course, the story of King Midas is

Matt Morgan (left) and Nathan Jones (far right) are a formidable pair for Paul Heyman. But can Heyman keep the behemoths happy?



April 2, 1995
Hartford Civic Center
Hartford, Connecticut



difficult



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Collector's Series
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not simply about being able to turn everything to gold and having it work out for the best. For those of you who have forgotten—and it's more than likely that Heyman himself has—the story of King Midas goes like this:

Silenus, an old-school master, became drunk and wandered away from his home. He was found by some peasants, who took him to their king, Midas. King Midas took care of him for 10 days and nights. Afterward, he took him back home.

When Silenus returned home, his old student, Bacchus, was ecstatic to see him. As a reward to Midas, he offered to give the king anything he desired. Midas, much like Paul Heyman, lusted after

money and wealth, so he wished that anything he would touch would turn to gold.

Midas couldn't have been happier when Bacchus made his wish come true. He touched a branch, and it turned to gold. He held a stone in his hands, and it turned to gold. He grabbed an apple from a tree, and it turned to gold.

Midas was so happy that he decided to hold a feast. All the finest foods and wines were provided. The only thing was, he couldn't eat or drink. Every time Midas picked up a morsel to eat, it turned to gold. Every time a drop of wine touched his lips, it, too, turned to gold.

Midas suddenly realized that he would soon starve to death. He couldn't eat or drink, and just as horrific, if he touched another human being, they would also turn to gold.

The sorrowful king thus prayed to Bacchus to reverse his wish. Bacchus, being a compassionate creature, accepted Midas' plea, and the king was returned to normal. From that day forward, Midas abhorred wealth and splendor and tried to live an exemplary life.

Paul Heyman, of course, has not yet had his Midas-like revelation. He still yearns for wealth as if he were dying of thirst and the only thing that could quench him is the almighty dollar. Heyman has received his comeuppance from many former clients, but as everyone knows, he has not changed his ways.

What will happen when his new charges—Matt Morgan and Nathan Jones—leave him remains to be seen. But, it would not be surprising if the three eventually went their separate ways; there is little doubt that this relationship will end horribly. Might Heyman finally have bitten off more than he can chew?

Conventional wisdom says yes. But, conventional wisdom does not always prevail in sports-entertainment. One former client of Heyman's, who wished to remain anonymous, lest anyone think that he still respects the man, had the following to say:

"Paul Heyman is the most duplicitous, conniving, sneaky man I have ever met. He is addicted to money and will do whatever it takes to acquire it. And rest assured, he will never be satisfied until

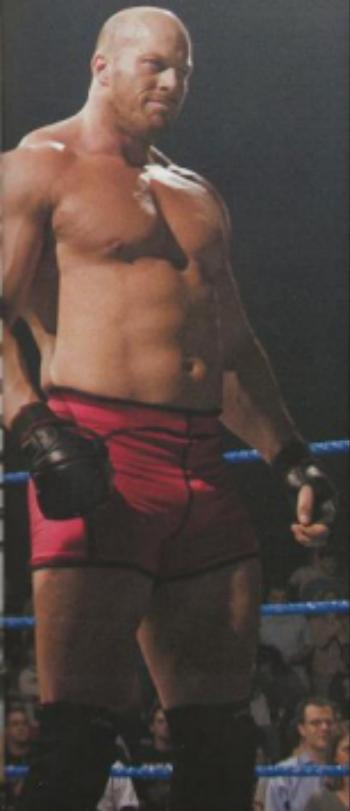
WHILE REVILED, HEYMAN IS A SHREWD TALENT SCOUT.

he has every last dollar on earth sitting in his bank account. It doesn't matter how many times he gets humiliated or loses a battle. He will come back stronger than ever. I'd say there's a one percent chance that Morgan and Jones could eventually beat enough sense into him so that he wouldn't be so evil, but that really doesn't say much about those chances."

Heyman refused to return calls for this story. When *SmackDown!* Magazine reached his office, his secretary informed us that he was in a very important meeting regarding endorsement deals for his clients and that he would get back to us when he could. An inside source confirmed that when Heyman found out that we wanted to question him about his lust for wealth, he flew into a rage and vowed that he would never speak to the magazine unless he obtained editorial control of the entire publication.

There is perhaps no more controversial figure on *SmackDown!* than Paul Heyman. While reviled for his conduct, he is respected as a businessman and talent scout. Some say that those who employ his services make a pact with the devil and eventually pay for their greed. Others see him as a genius, perhaps a conniving one, but still a genius that knows how to squeeze every last drop of money out of the extraordinary athletes that he represents.

Will Heyman ever learn the lesson of King Midas? Might he discover that his love of the almighty dollar will only end up in tragedy? Or is he just beginning on his path to become the richest man in the world? ■



BECOMING

The Metamorphosis of Linda Miles

By Brian Solomon



SHANIQUA



It all started on those road trips to Connecticut. From her freshman year as part of Rutgers' women's basketball team, Linda Miles—No. 40 for the Rutgers Scarlet Knights—always took notice of the monolithic WWE headquarters off Interstate 95 as the team passed it on the way to play the University of Connecticut Huskies. She would brag to her teammates that one day, she would be working for that company.

It's very likely that Linda did believe that at the time. What is less likely is that she could predict the transformation she would undergo to achieve that dream.

WWE fans first got to know Linda as a contestant on *Tough Enough* 2 in 2002. The confident, highly athletic young woman viewers became acquainted with on the show wound up as one of the two winners. The prize was a WWE contract, and Linda immediately reported for duty to Ohio Valley Wrestling (OVW), WWE's Louisville training ground. The woman who returned from that experience was not the Linda Miles *TE* watchers were familiar with; she was now Shaniqua.

"I feel the persona is something that's a little part of everyone," she says. "We all have this dominatrix control thing within us. It was just a matter of bringing it to life. Shaniqua is just a different side of me. I was always more of the athletic type, but Shaniqua brings out a different side that's interesting to explore."

A mysterious Amazonian clad in a skimpy leather get-up complete with an intimidating riding crop, Shaniqua is a far cry from the former WNBA hopeful who first showed up at the *Tough Enough* tryouts two years ago. Flanked by her tag team, the Basham Brothers, she is one of the most attention-grabbing Superstars on the *SmackDown!* roster, with an imposing presence that also projects a raw sensuality.

"I'm loving the patent leather. I'm feelin' it," she says. "The whole thing about Shaniqua is



that she's a part of who I am. I'm naturally a strong, confident individual, and Shaniqa presents that, just in a bigger light."

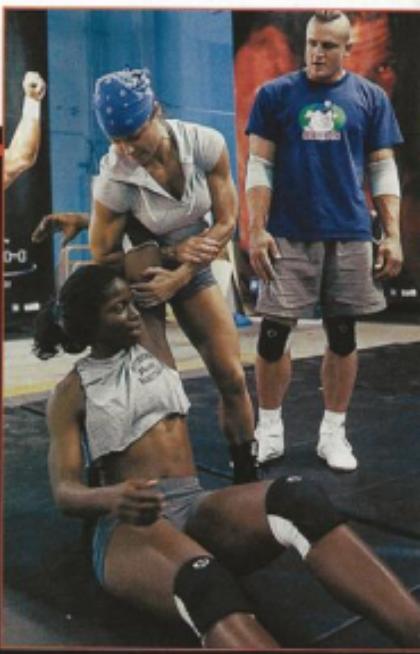
It's become cliché to talk about how Superstars' ring personas are just amplifications of their everyday personalities, but in Linda's case, the cliché is very much true. The attitude she puts forth in her day-to-day life—the same attitude

that's allowed her to progress so far at such a young age—is the source of what Shaniqa is. Linda just had the insight and ability to take that attitude and tailor it for the larger-than-life world of WWE.

There was another reason Shaniqa's WWE transformation may have been surprising to fans who remembered her as Linda Miles. Given her obvious physical assets, most had assumed she would immediately become a force to reckon with inside the ring. Yet as of press time, Shaniqa has been making her presence felt in an outside-the-ring role, keeping the Bashams in line and making anyone who might want to cross their paths think three times before doing so. It's a powerful role to be in, even if it's not what she originally expected.

"It's kind of a curveball, but when you're an athlete who can play any sport, you can catch any ball they can throw," she says with typical bravado. "I love the excitement of being in the ring. But one thing I've found about life is that it's a matter of knowing what to do with the ball when it's given to you. Right now I look at it as an opportunity to run with the ball."

"I really enjoy being outside the ring right now, because I'm getting to hear the crowd," she continues. "I'm getting a sense, feeling them. When you're in the ring as a newcomer, you're focused on what you're doing in



the match. But right now, I get to listen to the emotions—the ups and downs. I'm enjoying that. But I can play any role I need to play, in the ring, outside the ring, behind the mic, whatever it may be."

A lot took place in the year between Linda Miles, *Tough Enough* winner, and Shaniqa, *SmackDown!* Diva. The rigors of OVW gave her a basic groundwork for the business and taught her how to succeed. Under the guidance of people like OVW owner Danny Davis and matchmaker Jim Cornette, she was able to take her athletic background—which is among the most impressive of any woman in sports-entertainment—and apply it to the unique world she now performs in.

"It's been a year of training, a year of getting to know Linda Miles as an individual, a year of becoming a *SmackDown!* Superstar," she says. "The difference between me then and now is that I've gotten some skills in the ring, so I'm a lot more comfortable there. I've gotten to work with great wrestlers in



OVW, and with [WWE road agent] Fit Finlay in the ring. He's taken the time to help mold me. I'm a lot more confident."

Despite her managerial role, Shaniqua's persona is rooted in her physical presence. In that sense, Linda drew some of her inspiration from a certain Ninth Wonder of the World.

"Chyna gave me the belief," she says. "It was when I saw her—a woman of her stature, presence and build—that gave me the will to put the work in, train and learn the way I needed to learn. I really felt I could follow in her footsteps and perpetuate what she started in the business: being a totally different level of woman."

From the moment she first walked out with the Bashams, it was clear that Shaniqua was indeed on another level. And she

readily admits that a great deal of her initial success has been due to Danny and Doug.

"The blessing is that I had worked with them in OVW," she says. "I'm naturally confident with them, because I know them. They make me feel safe and secure. It's a learning process for them, too. This is a bigger arena, a bigger stage. I really like the challenge. I like to see what I can produce when I'm under pressure."

If there's any pressure at all, she certainly isn't showing it. The transition from Linda Miles to Shaniqua has been smooth as silk, and few rookies have adapted as well to such a radical persona overhaul. She's a natural, which anyone who knew her background could have told you in the first place. ■



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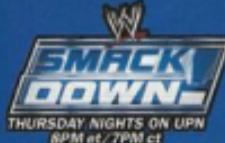
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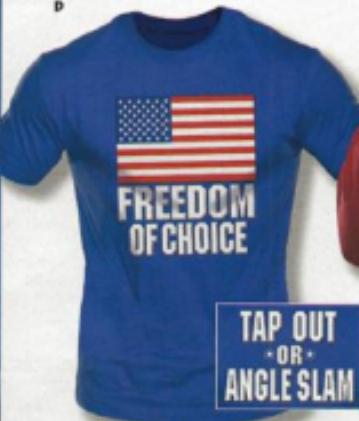
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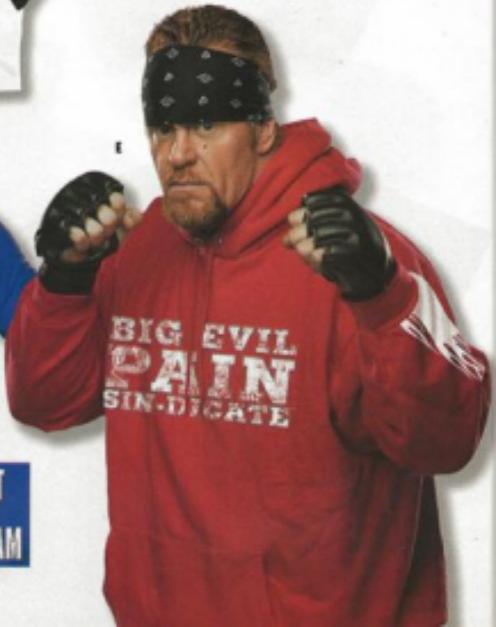
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saying goodbye

The Superstars Bid Farewell to Mike "Crash Holly" Lockwood

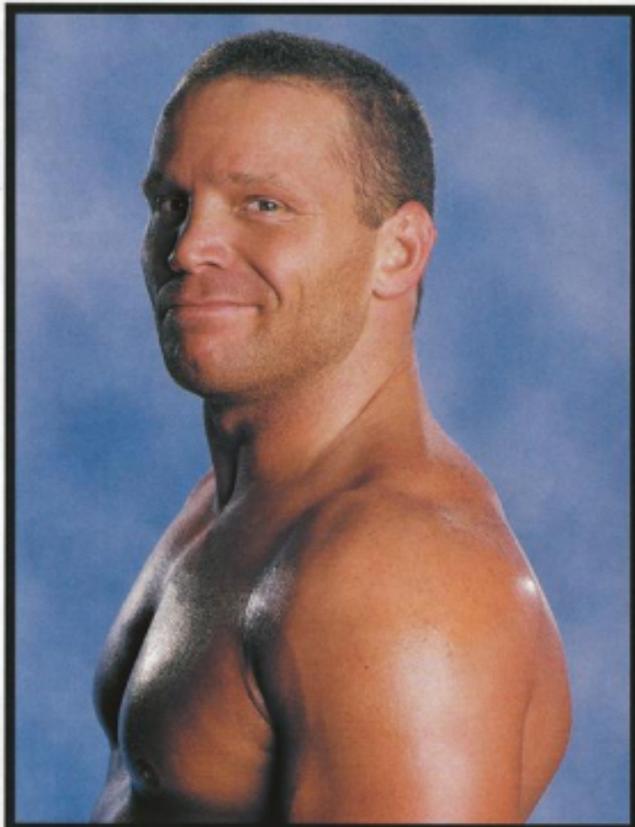
1971-2003

the tragic and sudden passing last November of Mike Lockwood—known to WWE fans as "Crash Holly"—was deeply felt by all. A member of the WWE roster from 1999 until mid-2003, Crash left an indelible mark with viewers, who will never forget his cocky attitude, his boundless energy and his often-hilarious antics.

He was dubbed "the Houdini of Hardcore" for his amazing performances in the anything-goes hardcore matches that were once a staple of many WWE broadcasts. Crash was the first to defend the Hardcore Championship under the infamous 24/7 rule, and held it an incredible 21 times between 2000 and 2002. The unpredictable events that surrounded Crash and his Hardcore title were among the highlights of most WWE programs.

To his fellow SmackDown! Superstars, he was a one-of-a-kind presence in the locker room, and none who worked with him will ever forget him. At a recent event, we spoke to a number of them, who were more than willing to share their memories of this unique individual.

"Crash was my boy. I met him in 2000. He came to Ultimate Pro Wrestling to work with me when I was still no good, I mean, I was absolutely horrible. We hit it off right away, because I appreciated him and he wanted to get in the ring with me. When I first started doing



house shows with WWE, I worked with him probably the first eight weeks in a row. We shared similar attitudes and similar beliefs.

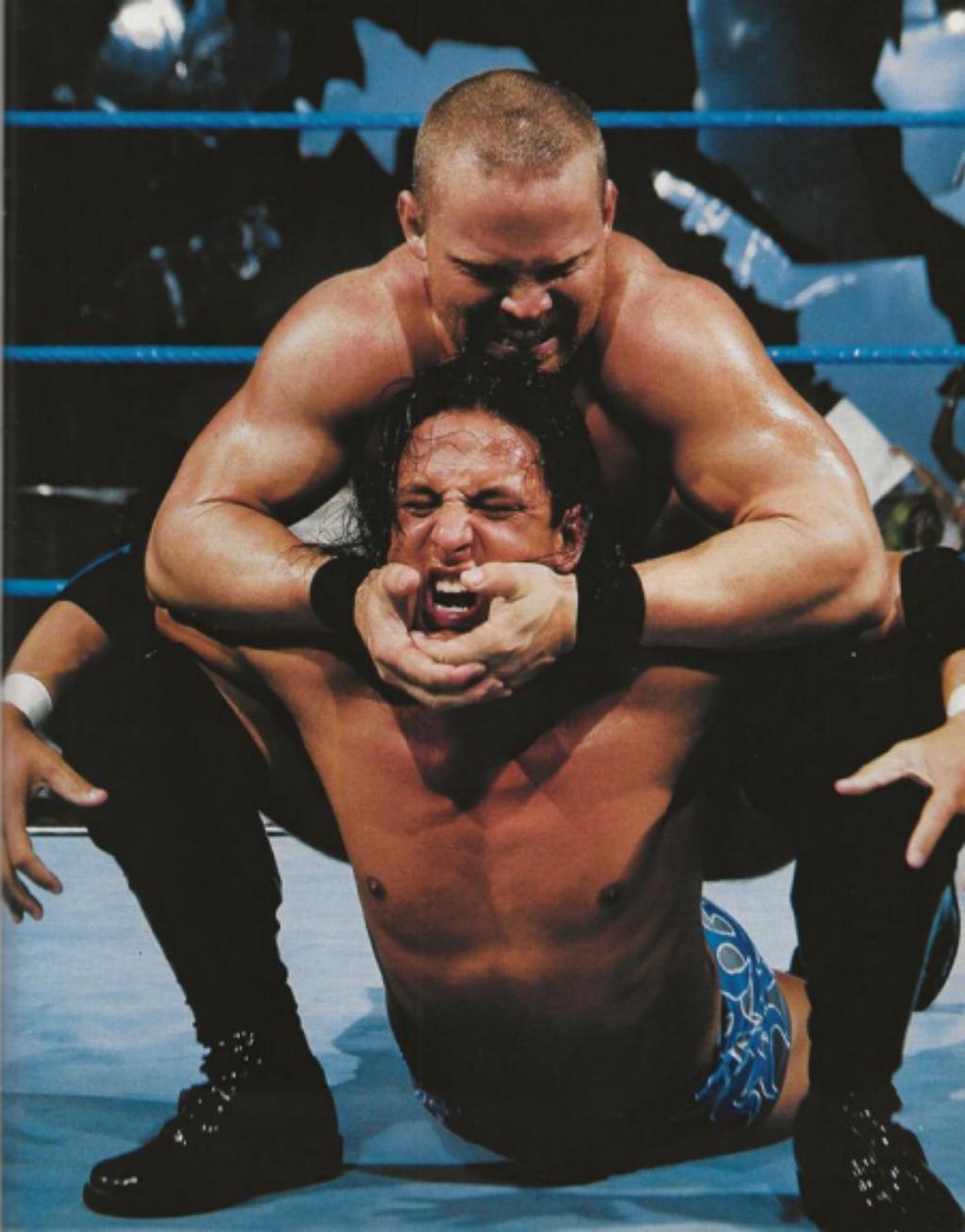
He was never afraid to make an ass of himself, in or out of the ring. At a time when everyone else was just stone-faced serious, he brought comfortable comedy into the ring. I tried to learn from that. That's what I remember about him, his

ability to just make everybody laugh. He was awesome. I was speechless when I heard what happened; he was one of my very good friends. His memory will definitely live on."

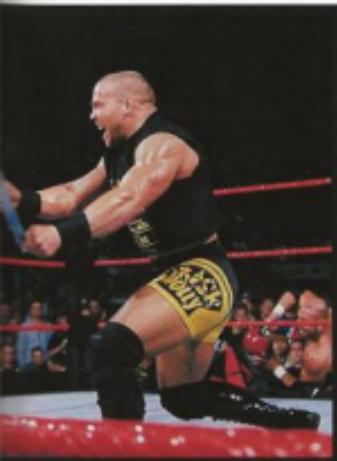
— John Cena

"It's just a shame. He was a good guy. Just a shame, that's all."

— Hardcore Holly







"When I was in Louisville at Ohio Valley Wrestling, he came down to work with everyone, and he worked hard. He was open-minded. He was willing to talk to a lot of the young people working out there. He always gave his advice whenever anyone had a question about being in the ring."

— Shaniqwa

"The first time I ever met Crash was back in ECW. He was there for a short stint. I never really got to know him, but he was always cool to me. I got to see him again when I got hired here last year. He was very nice to me coming in, and that was very important. He always helped me out, told me what to do and what not to do. He was always good to me. This is a terrible loss for the wrestling world."

— Nunzio

"Right before my brother passed away, he got sick and couldn't tag with me. I ended up working against Crash in singles matches. They were the first singles matches of my career. I remember he really showed me how it's done. He really helped me feel comfortable going on my own as a singles wrestler. He was down to earth, always fun to have around—one of the nicest guys. That's what I remember about Crash."

— Charlie Haas

"He was a real fun guy to be around—kind of wacky. He actually would call me, even after he left the company, and leave me frequent messages about wanting to challenge Charlie and I for the titles! He didn't mind giving his opinion, which has its pros and cons. My heart goes out to his family."

— Shelton Benjamin

"I didn't know Crash that well. I wrestled him twice, and they were two of the best matches I've ever had. It's very sad that this has happened. He was very nice to me, always willing to help me out and give advice. When we were in the ring together, he made me feel very comfortable."

— Nathan Jones

"First of all, my condolences go out to his family. My prayers are with them. What I remember about Crash is that he was a happy guy. He was always able to crack a joke and make everybody laugh. He would lighten up the dressing room when he was in it."

— Eddie Guerrero

"He was my partner, and a good opponent. When I got my contract, about five years ago, he got his contract about the same time. I have many memories of him. You have no idea how very sad this is."

— Fumaki

"He had a lot of energy in everything he did. He was also outspoken. Whether it was good or bad, you knew what he had to say. It's sad. He'll be missed. He definitely made me smile. Whatever he said was funny, even if it was negative—and a lot of the stuff he said was negative. He was just a lot of fun. I'll always remember him as a guy who spoke his mind, even if it got him in trouble."

— Rhyno

"I had a drink with Crash when he was leaving WWE. That was my last meeting with him. My TV debut match was against Crash. He made me look good for that debut match."

— Tajiri

"Anytime you've worked with somebody, and you get to know the person, it hurts when something like this happens. Crash was a hell of a guy—a guy that made me laugh. I used to enjoy watching him wrestle, because you never knew what he was going to come up with. I feel terrible about this. It's definitely a loss to our business. My condolences go out to his family."

— Rikishi

"I didn't know Crash that well, but I could tell he was a really friendly guy. He got along great with everybody. The one time that I really did get to talk to him, he threw an inside joke at me in regard to my independent work. It was very flattering, because it meant that Crash had heard of me and took notice of me. I was really flattered that he joked with me about that before even getting to know me. He was a really friendly guy, really cool."

— Paul London

"I knew him very well. He had a great sense of humor. He was crazy, but a really good guy, and he'll be really missed."

— Chavo Guerrero

"Crash Holly was the greatest Hardcore Champion ever. He took a lot of pride in that. When I first got here, for about the first two months, Nunzio and I were wrestling him and Shannon Moore. I was really nervous about coming here, because it was such a new start for me. But Crash made me feel very comfortable being here. I had met him a couple of times, but didn't really know him all that well before I came here. I got here toward the end of his tenure with the company, but I was riding with him and Shannon, or him and Jamie Noble. His last week here, he and I went to Hershey Park together. It was easily the best day I've had in my career. I kind of refuse to believe this is real—because if I really start thinking about it, I'll break down. I just wish I had the chance to say goodbye to him."

— Spanky

— Reporting by Brian Solomon

An Extreme Debut

Royal Rumble 2000

New York, NY

January 23, 2000

Just moments before Tazz was set to enter Madison Square Garden at the 2000 Royal Rumble and wrestle in WWE for the very first time, panic struck.

"What if the fans don't know who I am? What if they don't react?" he wondered.

His undefeated opponent, Kurt Angle, already in the ring, was berating the audience and his "mystery opponent." The noise in the "World's Most Famous Arena" quickly reached a fever pitch.

Tazz's music hit and the big number 13 appeared on the TitanTron. Tazz took a deep breath. The moment of truth was at hand. As Tazz made his way through the curtain, a deafening cheer went up. New York certainly recognized one of its own, and "The Human Wrecking Machine" smiled and thought, "I think they know who I am."

When Tazz signed with WWE and found out that he was to debut at the Garden at the Royal Rumble, he couldn't have been happier. Growing up in New York, he always dreamed of wrestling at MSG. He had a stellar career in ECW, but not having wrestled at the mecca of sports-entertainment was the one thing that left a void in his career.

In the weeks leading up to the Rumble, Tazz learned he would debut there. He figured that he would be in the Royal Rumble match itself. Two days before the event, though, he was told he was going to be Angle's mystery opponent. For Tazz, nothing could have been better.

"I had actually met Kurt shortly after he won the gold medal in Atlanta," Tazz told *SmackDown! Magazine*. "He came through ECW, where I was wrestling at the time, and actually did color commentary on an amateur rules match that I had with Nunzio. It's pretty crazy how a few years later, my first WWE match was against him and now, I'm doing color commentary on his matches on *SmackDown!*"





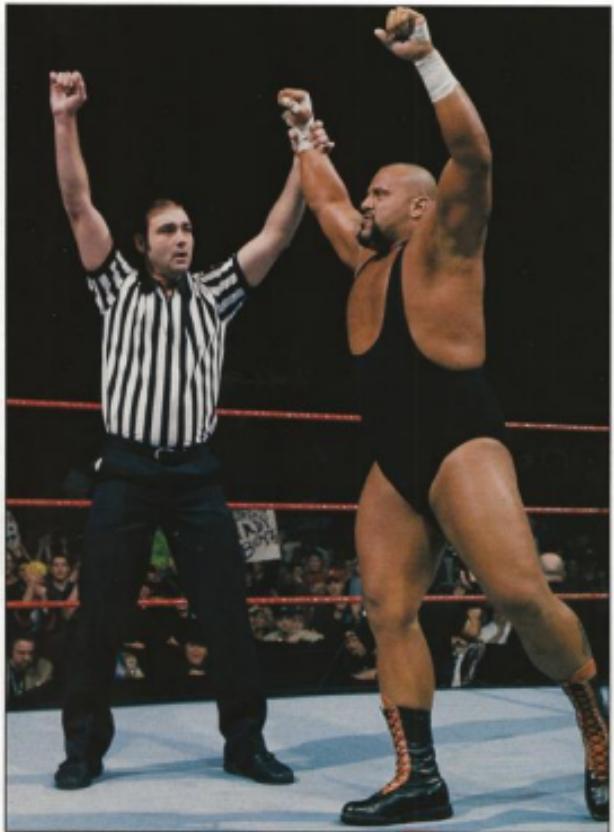
While Tazz was wired like a stick of dynamite right before he came to the ring, once he heard the cheers, he was all business and felt in his comfort zone.

Tazz had faced many great wrestlers in his day, but being in the ring with Angle was a whole different story.

"His speed and quickness were amazing," Tazz remembers. "I have a martial arts background and I've been in the ring with a lot of great athletes, but his speed was incredible. I really had to pick up my pace to be able to compete with him."

Both men had their moments during

the first few minutes of the match and the crowd ate up their technical masterpiece. Eventually, Angle took control and smashed Tazz's head into the turnbuckle. If Tazz ever needed a wake-up call, this was it. After the stars stopped circling around his head, he quickly realized that



he was not in the ring with just another wrestler. He was in there with Kurt Angle, and if he wanted to get out of there in one piece without being humiliated, he was going to have to gear his game up a few notches.

"I remember seeing stars after Kurt smashed my head into the turnbuckle. We had been having a good match, but after that shot, I think we took it up another notch."

The match did not end without con-

troversy. Tazz was able to put Angle in the Tazzmission, and Kurt couldn't escape. He bucked, and tried everything to get out, but Tazz held on for dear life. Angle did not tap out, but he was choked out. The referee checked his arm, once, twice, three times, and then called for the bell. Kurt Angle's undefeated streak was over. Tazz was declared the winner, but even he admits it was not without controversy.

"Technically, I won the match via submission, but there was some controversy

as to whether I won the match with an illegal choke hold. But, my hand was raised and Howard Finkel announced me as the winner. Once Finkel announces the winner, it's legit."

After the match, the first thing that went through Tazz's head was that the match went well and the fans accepted him. But almost immediately, he started thinking about the next steps he needed to take, and if it would go according to plan. As it turns out, things did not go according to plan. But, they turned out even better than he imagined they would, and he is much happier now being SmackDown's color commentator than competing in the ring.

For all his great matches, Tazz lists this one, his first in WWE, as his favorite. During the match, he allowed himself to absorb how big a step this was for his career and how big a moment it was for him. There were a lot of people watching him at the "World's Most Famous Arena," as he battled perhaps the world's best technical wrestler. This was a huge night both for Tazz and his family. The hometown boy had made good in his backyard. It is a night he will never forget, and he will always look back on it as his greatest match. ■

Kurt Angle Responds

As a man of integrity, not to mention intelligence and intensity, I must set the record straight on Tazz's claim that he ended my undefeated streak at the Royal Rumble. Tazz did not end my undefeated streak. He cheated and put me in a chokehold. The WWE rulebook clearly states that a chokehold is illegal. Tazz should have been disqualified. He did not pin me, he did not make me tap out. Cheaters should not be rewarded with victories.

The official record book may say that Tazz won, but everyone knows that he didn't, and the official result remains a complete miscarriage of justice. When justice is served and the record book gets changed—I believe it is currently under review by the authorities—there will be no controversy. Tazz did not beat me. And that, my friends, is true!

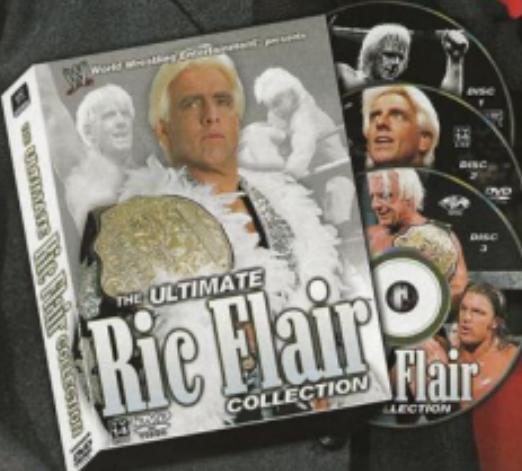


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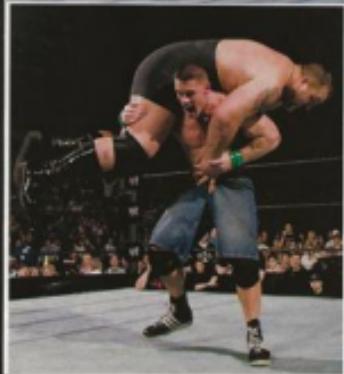
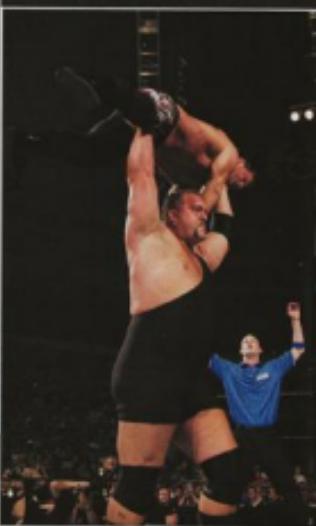


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Tag Team Elimination Match

John Cena, Kurt Angle, Chris Benoit, Hardcore Holly & Bradshaw def. Brock Lesnar, Matt Morgan, Nathan Jones, A-Train & Big Show

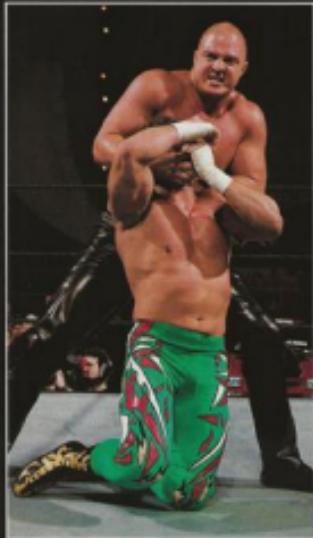
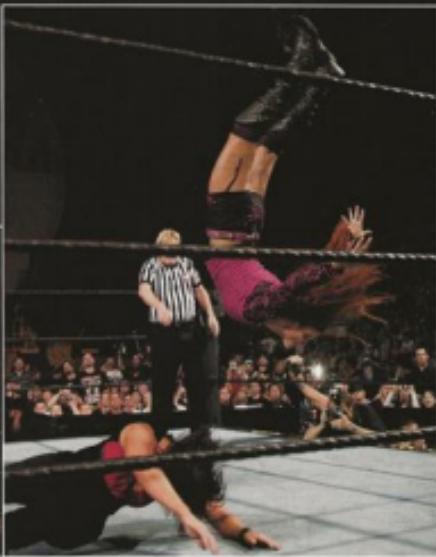
A throwback to WWE's traditional Survivor Series-style matchup, the opening bout was an elimination tag team match, SmackDown! style. Emotions ran high, and the eliminations came fast and furious. Hardcore Holly was disqualified even before the match was officially underway! In the end, it came down to John Cena and Chris Benoit against Big Show, and Cena wowed the Dallas faithful by delivering an F-U to the 500-pound Show and scoring the victory for his team.



Women's World Title Match

Molly Holly def. Lita

Lita's return to the active roster was one of 2003's greatest comeback stories, but she couldn't quite pull off the task of defeating Molly Holly for her Women's Championship. It's been almost four years since Lita last held that title, and it remains as elusive as ever to the eXtreme Diva. This time around, Molly tenaciously withstood Lita's aerial onslaught, waiting for the chance to score a surprise pin.



WWE Tag Team Championship

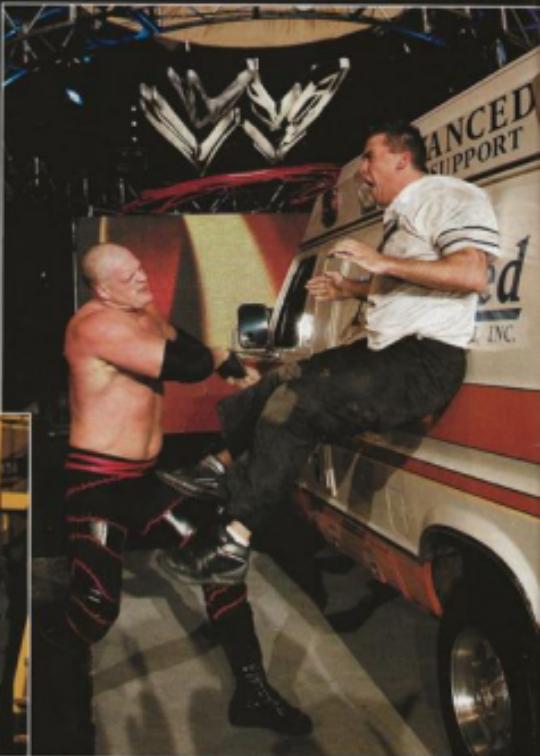
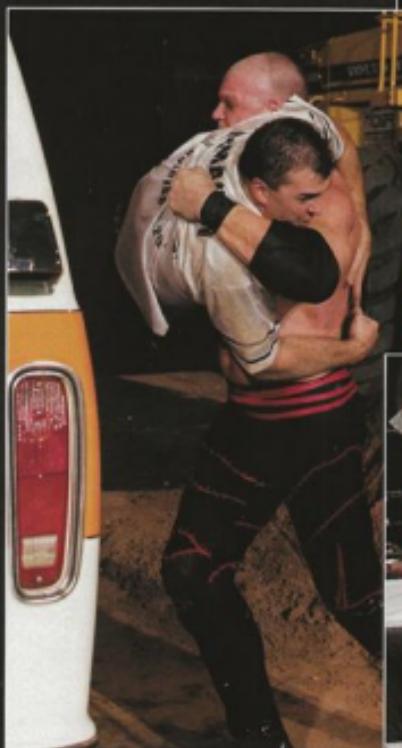
Basham Brothers (with Shaniqwa) def. Los Guerreros

Miscommunication continued to be the order of the day for Los Guerreros. Ever since Chavo returned to action, things haven't been the same for the uncle/nephew team, and on this night it cost them the WWE Tag Team title. The Bashams, with a little help from Shaniqua, bested Eddie & Chavo in the end to get out of Dallas with their gold.

Ambulance Match

**Kane def.
Shane McMahon**

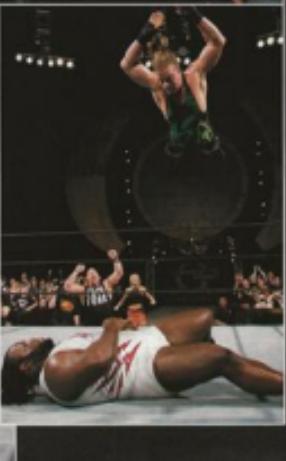
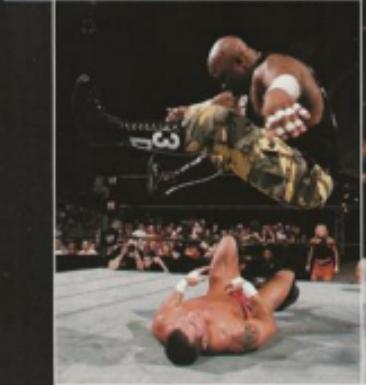
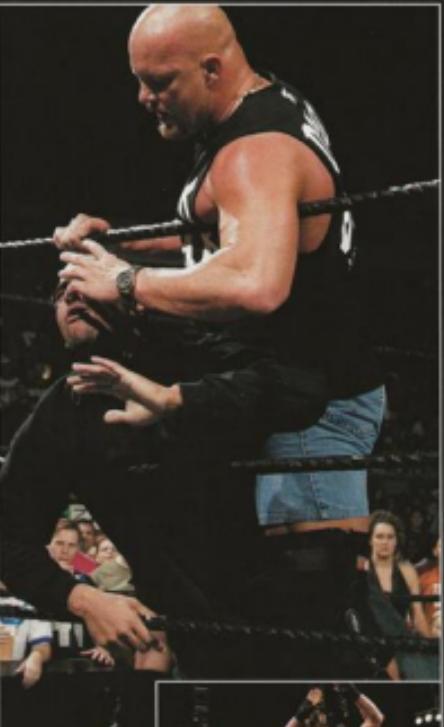
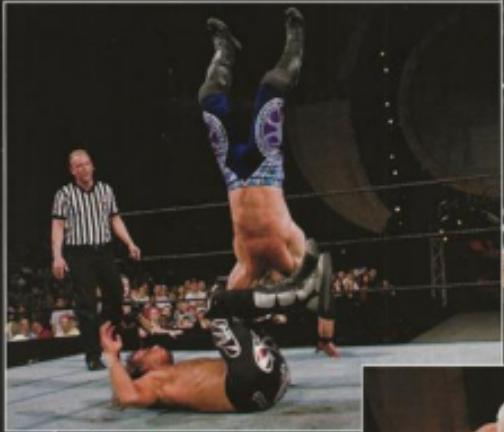
The brutal war between Shane and Kane came to a horrific and unfortunate conclusion at Survivor Series, as Kane exacted his vengeance upon the Chairman's son. In the first Ambulance Match in WWE history, the stakes were high, but both men knew what they were in for. After several minutes in which Shane miraculously held the upper hand over the behemoth, Kane finally took over. He proceeded to systematically thrash Shane-O Mac all over the arena, finally pilingriving him on the concrete floor and loading him into the waiting ambulance for the win.



Tag Team Elimination Match

Randy Orton, Scott Steiner, Chris Jericho, Mark Henry & Christian def. Shawn Michaels, Booker T, the Dudley Boyz & Rob Van Dam

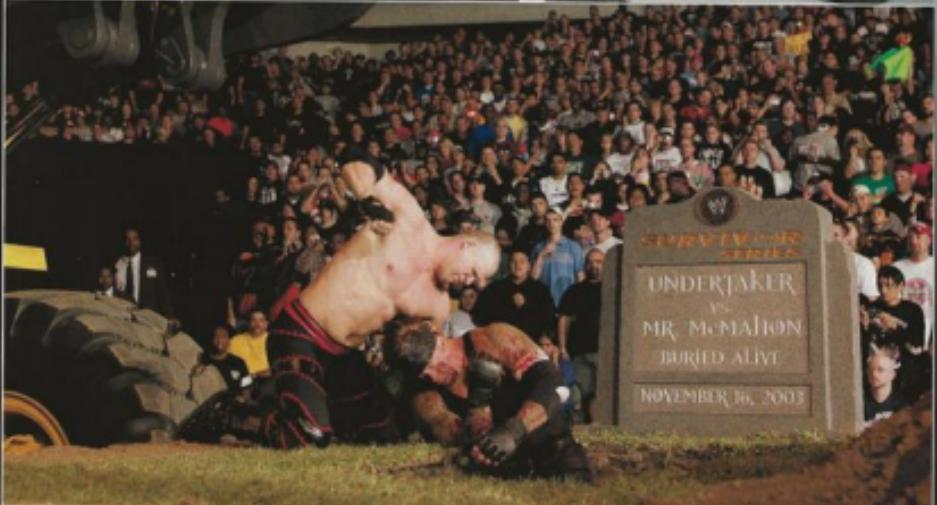
With Stone Cold Steve Austin's career on the line, HBK led an all-star team into battle against Eric Bischoff's fearsome fiveosome. But Bischoff's team won in the end due to interference by the massive Batista, bringing an end to Stone Cold's WWE tenure. Coach tried to humiliate Austin, but received a trouncing for his efforts.

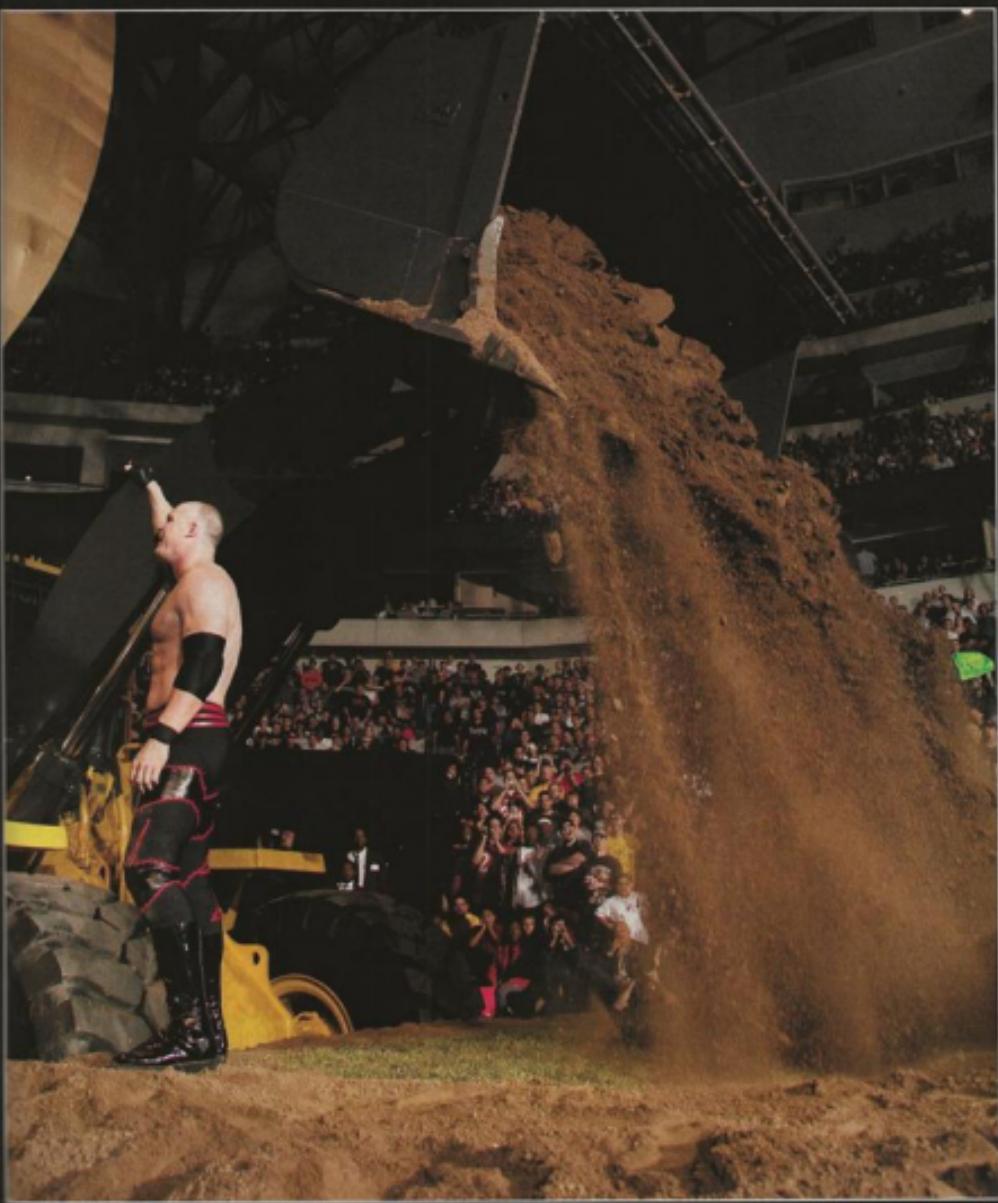


Buried Alive Match

Vince McMahon def.
Undertaker

The impossible became a reality at Survivor Series, as Vince McMahon actually defeated Undertaker in a vicious Buried Alive match. Vince was a man on an evil mission, and with the assistance of 'Taker's half-brother Kane, he was able to achieve that mission and put the Deadman six feet under. Just when it looked like the beaten and bloodied Chairman was about to take a dirt nap, the Big Red Monster made a timely appearance and helped him put Undertaker into the grave. The Deadman has not been seen since, and some wonder if he will ever return.

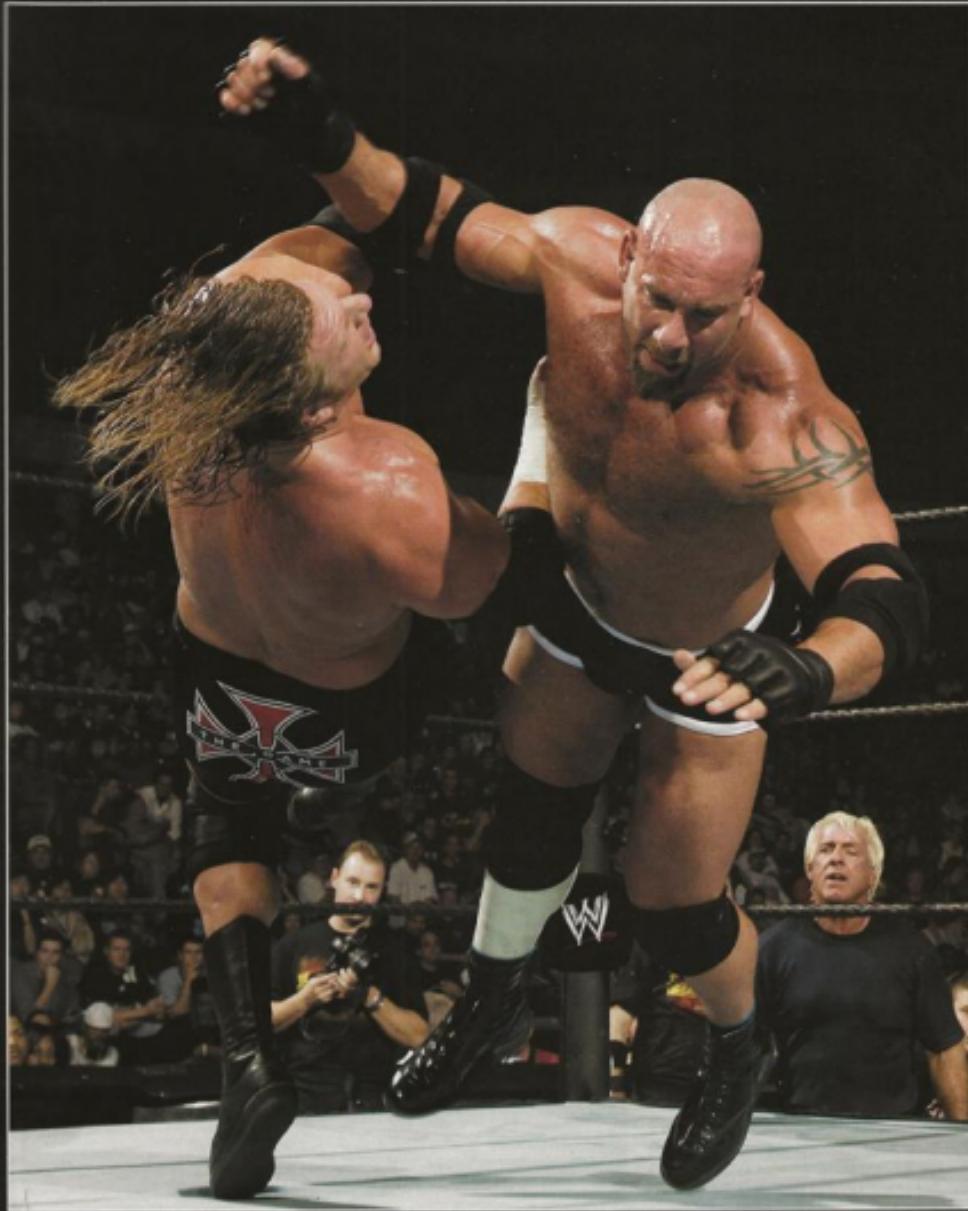




World Championship Goldberg def. Triple H

Triple H came into Survivor Series looking to prove that Goldberg was nothing more than a flavor of the month, but failed miserably, much to the delight of fans watching around the world. Goldberg took everything "The Game" had to throw at him, even avoiding the dreaded sledgehammer and Pedigree. He also tossed aside the challenges of Evolution, crushing Batista, Ric Flair and Randy Orton in their bids to interfere on Triple H's behalf. Finally, he put Triple H down for the count, retaining his World Championship in a hard-fought bout that saw him put on quite possibly the finest performance of his entire career.





Messin' with a Country Boy

How WrestleMania XX Brought Back an '80s Icon

Most fans remember the towering, amiable Hillbilly Jim as a staple character of WWE's Hulkamania era of the late 1980s. But what they may not realize is that the Hillbilly was actually a part of WWE for 17 years, segueing from a highly successful in-ring career to work behind the scenes. And now, with all eyes turning toward WrestleMania XX, WWE has once again called upon the services of Mud Lick, Kentucky's favorite son to help get the word out.

Back in 1984, Jim Morris made one of the most unique debuts in WWE history, first appearing as a fan in the crowd. But that was not the beginning of Morris' adventures in the business. Actually, it all started in the late 1970s, when he began wrestling in the Kentucky area under his given name. His first taste of travelling came with a stint in Stu Hart's Calgary Stampede promotion. Next, it was back south to the Memphis territory, where Morris donned biker gear and became known as Harley Davidson.

When Jim got a chance to work for WWE as the company was in the midst of its national expansion, it was clear he would need a new persona, something unique to the business. That was when Hillbilly Jim was born. A jovial country boy with a massive physique, it was just the kind of thing that fit right in with the company's colorful landscape at the time.

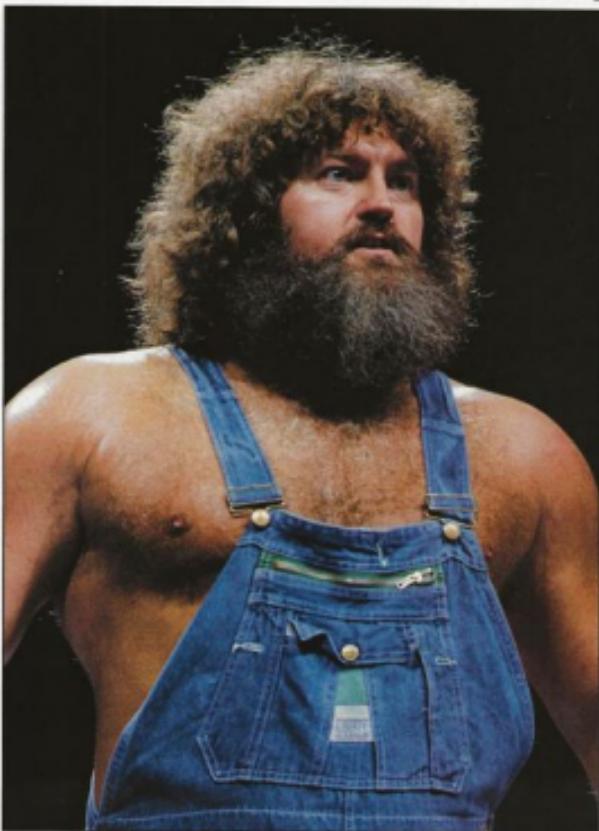
"The hillbilly characters were always popular in metropolitan areas, because it was a novelty," Jim says. "So it was always big in New York, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and places like that. The time had come for it to come back around again."

His introduction as a face in the crowd was unforgettable, as the TV announcers pointed him out during each appearance. Pretty soon, he became a familiar sight to viewers, with

his full beard, denim overalls and floppy brown hat. Finally, in Poughkeepsie, New York, he became much more than just a fan. As Hulk Hogan suffered a triple-teaming in the ring from Ken Patera, King Kong Bundy and Bobby

"The Brain" Heenan, Hillbilly Jim left his seat and hit the ring to rescue the Hulkster.

Hillbilly Jim had officially become a WWE Superstar. In the ensuing weeks, vignettes were aired on TV showing





Uncle Elmer (left) was the second addition to WWE's hillbilly faction of the mid-1980s. His 1985 wedding, televised on *Saturday Night's Main Event*, was immortalized by an appearance from 'Rowdy' Roddy Piper.

Hogan training the Hillbilly for the ring, and before long, he was a regular member of the roster. During this landmark period in WWE history, he became one of the company's most recognizable Superstars, battling villains with a smile on his face and dancing in the ring to his theme song, "Don't Go Messin' with a Country Boy."

"It was a wonderful time, because some of the things that were happening then had never happened before," he remembers. "The Hulk Hogan thing

at that time was amazing, a real resurgence of the business. Anything that Hogan was associated with was pretty much gold. Everywhere we would go, it would sell out. At that time, we would do three shows, three crews going across the country at the same time. Sometimes on the weekends, we would do double shots, maybe an afternoon show in Landover, Maryland, and an evening show in Richmond, Virginia. I remember even doing double shots with Toronto in the afternoon and Cincinnati

at night. We would go extended periods of days. I remember one time I went 63 straight days, and I flew 53 of the 63 days. There was quite a burnout factor. If you ever got hurt in the middle of a tour like that, you could never get over it, because you were wrestling every night. But it was a great time. Everybody was into it, people from all walks of life."

He was so popular that when he

Hillbilly Jim was a part of some of the most memorable moments in one of WWE's watershed periods.

was put on the shelf with a knee injury at the start of 1985, additional hillbilly characters were brought in to keep the whole thing going. The first was the mammoth "Uncle Elmer," a longtime veteran named Stan Frazier, who had previously competed in the World Wide Wrestling Federation as The Convict. Elmer was later joined by Cousin Junior and Cousin Luke, and they were all managed by the convalescing Hillbilly Jim. Once he recovered, he tag teamed for a while with the other three, but they soon faded out. Jim was the main attraction, and he was back in action.

Hillbilly Jim was a part of some of the most memorable moments in one of WWE's watershed periods. To this day, many fans fondly remember his mixed tag team match at *WrestleMania III*. In that bout, he joined forces with midget wrestlers Little Beaver and the Halti Kid to take on King Kong Bundy and his midget duo of Lord Littlebrook and Little Tokyo. Jim remembers it fondly as well.

"*WrestleMania III* is one of my favorite moments," he says. "It had never been done before—that many people indoors—in the history of the world. It was like an ocean of people, the most receptive crowd. All you had to do was raise your hand, and there was just this

tremendous roar. We knew we were doing something historic."

By the end of the 1980s, Jim started suffering from a neck problem that wouldn't go away. It was determined to be disc-related, and no treatment short of career-ending surgery seemed to be of any use. Having no desire to hang on as an active competitor any longer than his body would realistically allow, he decided to call it quits. But he still had a strong desire to be a part of WWE.

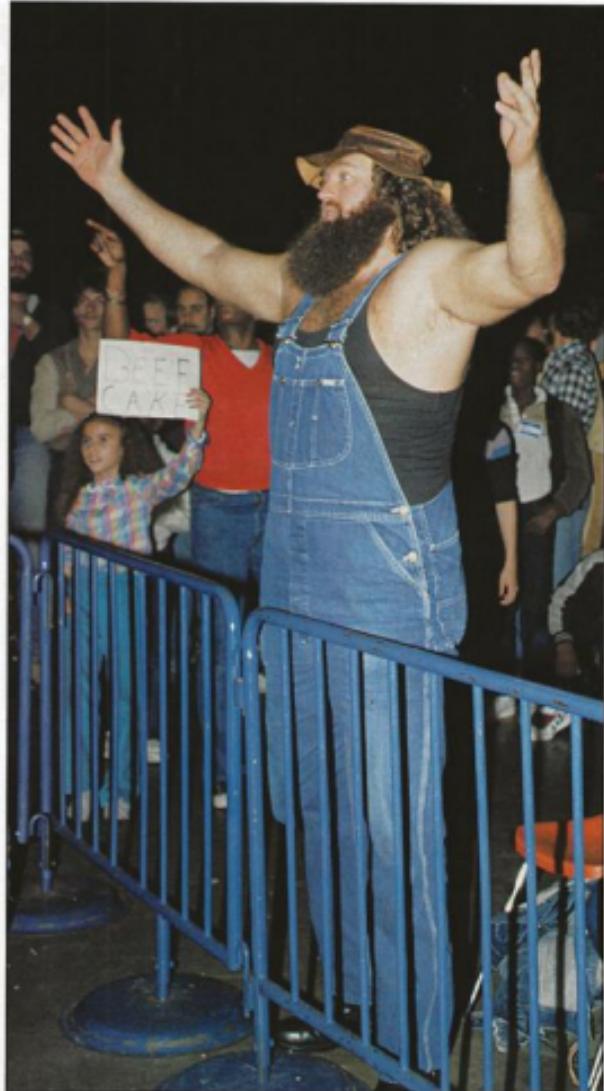
For more than a decade, Hillbilly Jim worked behind the scenes... even breaking out the hat and overalls for an occasional in-character appearance.

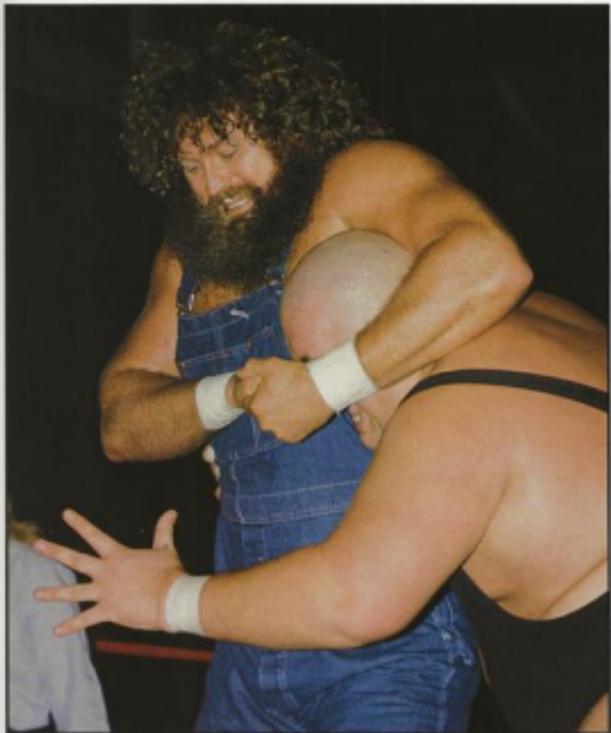
As far as fans were concerned, Hillbilly Jim was gone. But that was the farthest thing from the truth. Thanks to numerous personal appearances over the years, Jim was well acquainted with the folks at Coliseum Video, the exclusive distributors of WWE home video at the time.

"I told them, 'I'd like to do some stuff with you guys, maybe help on the sales end if I could,'" he recalls. "They thought, 'What a great concept, to have a salesman come in to talk about something he's actually a part of.' I was able to start out doing sales rep work, and it was great. After my neck surgery, I was pretty well finished. So I signed on as a sales rep. As the years went by, WWE decided to take it in-house, so they took over the video and it became WWE Home Video. I had an office at WWE Headquarters in Stamford, but I would basically work out of my house."

For more than a decade, Hillbilly Jim worked behind the scenes in this

Face in the Crowd: Hillbilly Jim got his WWE start as a colorful ringside fan.





manner, even breaking out the hat and overalls for an occasional in-character appearance to help promote WWE's videos. He didn't completely abandon the ring, either, returning in the mid-1990s as the manager of Henry & Phineas Godwinn, the next generation of WWE's hillbillies. In 2001 at WrestleMania X-7, he even made a one-time-only return to competition, taking part in the unforgettable Gimmick Battle Royal.

The Hillbilly parted ways with WWE later that year, ending nearly two decades of service to the company. That service was never forgotten, and when the company needed a legend to take part in the "Road to WrestleMania"

promotional tour currently getting underway, they turned to Jim.

As this magazine goes to press, Jim is preparing to hit the road once again, spreading the word about WrestleMania XX to cities across North America. The appearances are expected to lead right into March, and may even include live remotes during WWE TV programs.

The chance to once again be a part of WWE at such a big moment in the company's history is both an honor for Hillbilly Jim, and a thrill for the millions of fans who sang his praises for all those years. They never forgot the country boy, and he certainly never forgot them. ■

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Barry Werner
Barry Werner, Publisher

Multiple Choice:

1. Who did Sgt. Slaughter defeat for the WWE Championship?
 a. Hulk Hogan
 b. Ultimate Warrior
 c. Undertaker

2. What was the first singles title won by Matt Hardy?
 a. Hardcore
 b. Cruiserweight
 c. European

3. What was the name of Davey Boy Smith's bulldog mascot during his first WWE singles run?
 a. Matilda
 b. Damien
 c. Winston

4. What FBI member was once a member of ECW's roster?
 a. Nunzio

5. Who was the first guest on Piper's Pit when it briefly returned to WWE TV in 2002?
 a. Rikishi
 b. Mr. America
 c. Vince McMahon

6. The Killer Bees were composed of B. Brian Blair and...
 a. "Jumpin'" Jim Brunzell
 b. Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart
 c. Paul Roma

7. Against whom did Brock Lesnar defend the WWE Championship at 2002's Backlash?
 a. Kurt Angle
 b. Undertaker
 c. John Cena

8. Who was the manager of The Twin Towers?
 a. Mr. Fuji
 b. Frenchy Martin
 c. Slick

9. Who was Butterbean's opponent at WrestleMania XV?
 a. "Dr. Death" Steve Williams
 b. Bart Gunn
 c. The Godfather

10. Who did Chris Benoit beat for the WCW World title just before he arrived in WWE in 2000?
 a. Sid Vicious
 b. Ric Flair
 c. Jeff Jarrett

11. What SmackDown! Superstar was the last ECW Heavyweight Champion?
 a. Tajiri
 b. Rhyno
 c. Tazz

12. At what pay-per-view did Big Show make his first WWE appearance?
 a. 1999 Royal Rumble
 b. St. Valentine's Day Massacre
 c. Backlash '99



Answers: Multiple Choice: 1. b; 2. c; 3. a; 4. c; 5. a; 6. b; 7. c; 8. b; 9. a; 10. c; 11. b; 12. a

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The Perfect Fan!

What is the perfect WWE fan? That is a question that no one ever thinks to ask. Why is that? There are so many different types of people that support our very unique industry. I personally find it intriguing to look deep into this subject, being that our fans—or should I say “fans,”—are made up of some powerful ingredients. Out of all of the ingredients that make a WWE fan, I would have to say the most important one is *passion*!

We'll get into the “passion” part of the story in a few, but let's shift gears for a moment and talk about some of the types of fans I have run into during my time in our great business.

The Talker

This is the fan that comes up to you in a restaurant while you're waiting to be seated (with your wife or friend or family member) and the first thing he says to you is, “I hate to bother you, but...” followed by the classic, “You're my favorite!” Then he or she will ask for an autograph or picture, and I always say yes, which leads into the conversation between me and this stranger. You see, to me, this fan is a stranger, but he feels like he knows me because he listens to me on SmackDown! every Thursday night. The only problem with this whole situation is that the person accompanying me to this fine dining establishment is completely ignored. Then I usually get, “Man, I loved you in ECW!” (which leads me to believe you hate me now), or “Is Vince McMahon really like that?”, or “Do you know The Rock?” Well, you get the point.

The Follower

This is the one I have a little problem with. It weirds me out a little. You're in the mall or a supermarket and the dude is everywhere you are, watching every move you make—and he isn't trying to hide it!



He isn't even good at being sneaky. And to top it all off, he doesn't say a word to you. Look bro, I ain't gotta be Starsky, Hutch or even Magnum P.I. to figure out you're following me!

The Overly Prepared Guy

So I'm in the airport, waiting for my much-delayed connection, my cell phone is dead and I forgot my charger at home. Basically it is not a happy Tazz moment at Gate 21. Then I spot him—and he just spotted me. He's about 50 yards away at Gate 18 and he is walking with a purpose, getting closer with a stack of papers in hand. It almost appears that he is in a full sprint coming at me, and I'm frozen. I'm a deer in the headlights! Soon, I can see his Kurt Angle T-shirt as clear as day. He's at Gate 20 and around 14 yards away. By now I can tell it's not just papers in his hands, it's pictures—wrestling pictures, and the wrestler in those pictures is me!

And then, Bam! There he is, right there

with me at Gate 21! “Hey Tazz, what's up?” He's not shy, embarrassed or intimidated in the slightest. “Do you mind signing a few of these?” This guy has about 15 photo prints of yours truly from between 1997 and 2001, so I say, “Sure, would you like all of them addressed: ‘Dear eBay?’”

Well obviously, I am just joking around with this, but the bottom line is that WWE fans are made up of many different types of men, women and children, and all are filled with passion for both SmackDown! and Raw. And trust me, we wouldn't want it any other way!

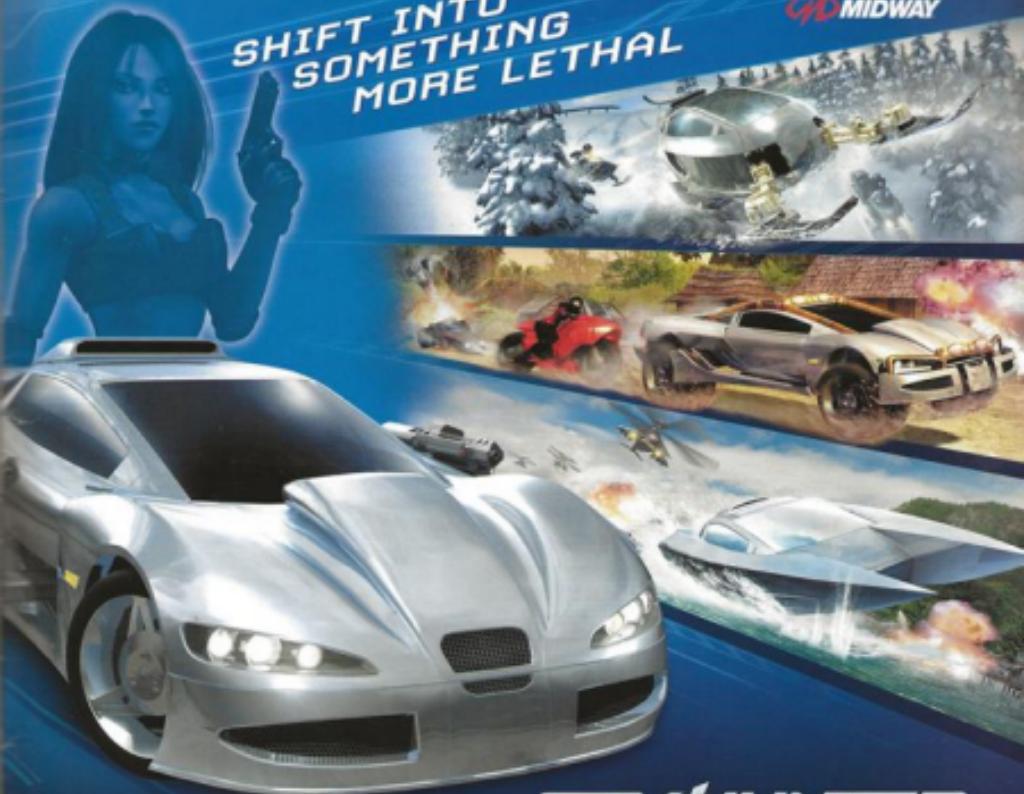
So in closing, what makes a perfect fan? All of the above. ■

Tazz's Top Three Weather Conditions

1. Rain
2. Snow
3. Sun

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